

THE SIN OF EDITH DEAN



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EDITH DEAN.

THE SIN OF EDITH DEAN

BY
BELLA FRENCH SWISHER

33
"The heart that has truly loved never forgets,
But as truly loves on to the close,
As the sunflower turns on her god, when he sets,
The same look that she turned when he rose."
—MOORE.

" . . . I built my house upon another's ground,
Mocked with a heart just caught at the rebound—
A cankered thing that looked so firm and sound."
—MULOCK.

"To err is human; to forgive, divine."—POPE.



NEW YORK
JOHN B. ALDEN, PUBLISHER

1890

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BY
BELLA FRENCH SWISHER.

TO
MRS. CHARLOTTE PRATT,

OF

Baraboo, Wisconsin,

*whose deeds of Christian charity and willing renunciation have
won my undying reverence and esteem, and whose
gentle hand, many years ago, guided me over rocks
and through brambles, during the darkest
hour of my whole life, this volume
is lovingly dedicated, by*

THE AUTHOR.

THE SIN OF EDITH DEAN.

PART FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

THE mellow sunlight of a sweet May morn
Gleamed on the snowy blossoms of the thorn,
Kissed the uprising, dew-wet blades of corn
And lay, a golden glory, where the breeze
Was tossing growing grainfields "into seas."

Though just above the hill-top shone the sun,
The farmer's day of toil was well begun.

Slow-stepping oxen, patient and sad-eyed,
Moved in obedience at their master's side,
While going forth to drag a heavy plow,
Preparing land for later crops; and now,
Released from farm-yards, here and there, a cow
Went lowing down a path or lane, to say
To her companions, she was on the way
And soon would join them at the meadow brook;
But each and all, without a backward look,
Though pausing, now and then, to nip the grass,
Which offered tempting morsels hard to pass

Yet touch not; trudged along, no thought in
mind

Of any mate that lowing came behind.

The smooth-plumed pigeons circled in the air,
With full intent to gain an ample share
Of yellow grain, which little Marguerite
Was scattering around for fowls to eat.

A farm-yard, barn and stable, were in view;
And at the bars, a horse was looking through,
Mouth watering, while asking more supplies
By the mute language of his wistful eyes.
Beyond, a garden, half-neglected, grew—
A tangled mass, which little order knew,
Though here and there were flowers wet with
dew;

And quite a colony of busy bees
Were making music in the lilac trees.

A rambling country-house, cool, plain and neat
Looked out upon a dull, suburban street,
Or rather road, where weeds were thick and
green,

And even stumps and bushes could be seen.

But to the west a thriving city lay—

Not large, yet had its railroads, hydrants, gas
And all the other comforts of that day.

Twice every week, a stage coach had to pass
The house just mentioned, while upon its way
'Twixt Summerville and Clyde, a weary road
Of fifty miles. (A hundred, with a load;
At least, so thought the travelers, before
The tiresome ride of ten long hours was o'er.)

Upon the porch, beneath a wild sweet-brier,
Which, having gained the roof, was climbing
higher,

Two women stood:—one young and very fair,
A wealth of beauty in her dark brown hair,
Which lay in massive rings upon her brow,

From thence caught back by pins, well to allow
A free sweep of the queenly neck, just seen
Above a snowy fichu's filmy sheen,
Worn with a traveling dress of gray cashmere.
Long lashes drooped o'er laughter-loving eyes,
Just now bedimmed, each by a single tear.
One thought them black, but found with some
surprise

That they were blue, and deep e'en as a well
Whose depths, by passing shadows, none can tell.
Her ears were small—likewise her hands and
feet.

Her bow-shaped mouth was loving, red and
sweet.

A well-cut nose gave beauty to a face
Where rose and lily struggled for a place.
Tall, willowy, her form was one of grace,
And every movement of refinement told.

The other woman was a trifle old,
And "silver threads" were seen "among the
gold"

Of her abundant hair. Careworn and pale,
Her face, which told the sad unwritten tale
Of life that was not all a dream of bliss.

Alas! the woes of living, none may miss;
And since each year must bring its weight of care,
Who longest lives must have the largest share.

"Lucinda," thus the elder spoke, "my heart
Is filled with sorrow that we thus should part!
If you were going home, it would be well.

Though I would miss you, I should not rebel;
Your mother has a prior claim to show.

But I am vexed and sad to see you go
Out in the world to earn a livelihood—

You who life's mildest storms have not withstood,
Since you were ever sheltered from each blast.

Why, why, if you will not dependent be

And take your living with my love from me,
 Return you not to her who gave you birth,
 Whose love for you is best of all the earth?"

"Aunt Esther," cried the girl, with sudden
 zest

A pale hand pressing to her throbbing breast,
 "You know not all that brought me to the west.
 God knows I love my own New Hampshire hills,
 Her fertile valleys and her sparkling rills;
 And sacred on the altar of my heart,
 My mother's memory has place and part,
 Beside that of the sister I adore!
 I long for them—but there is something more!
 I love with all my soul's idolatry,
 A man who most devoutly worships me!

"We two were once betrothed. An evil hour
 Caused one dark cloud of jealousy to low'r
 Which, growing, filled my soul with direful
 dread,

Then burst, a blast of fury, on my head!

"His mother had a friend—a fair young maid
 Whom he had wed, at once, had he obeyed
 His parent's stern commands. That couple laid
 A subtle scheme—I was their witless aid.

In my mad jealousy, I set him free
 And told him he was nothing more to me.
 Then, while the wound was deep, she, soothing
 came

Full of regretful love, and begged the blame
 Might all be hers—that she might intercede
 With wilful me; yet joyed that he was freed.

"But he was proud and maddened with the
 pain;

And, goaded by their pity grew insane
 For one brief hour—the saddest in his life.
 Alas! for me, who was his promised wife!
 She loved him, too, and with a woman's art

She set her snares to trap my Ronald's heart—
At least, his hand ; and well did she succeed !
She soothed him in his loneliness and need,
And, ere his reason had regained its throne,
He was her husband—yes, her very own !

“ Aunt Esther, well I know my eyes are bright,
My face is full and healthy, pink and white ;
But, God keep you from grief like mine that
night

When came the news that he was lost to me
Through all this life, perhaps Eternity !

“ I had not seen his bride except as she,
In passing, had been pointed out to me ;
For she had been at Ronald's home a guest,
There, for a season only, seeking rest ;
And there I called not, since his mother's hate
Had closed on me both door and garden-gate ;
But now I had an insane wish to know
If he had any share in my great woe !—
A longing, once, and only once, to see
The woman, who had taken him from me !

“ The house was all alight—the folks within.
(A quiet, tourless wedding, it had been ;
For, married in hot haste, no time had they
To make much preparation for the day.)
Like any thief, hid by night's sable pall,
I passed the gate, crept softly to the wall,
And looked in at a window. He was there,
His head bowed low upon an easy chair,
As if his life knew only blank despair ;
While she, fair, golden-haired, and robed in
white,

Flashed on my vision like a thing of light.

“ ‘ My husband and my love,’ I heard her say,
‘ God pity me, if you regret this day.’
And on his drooping head a hand she laid,
With mute caress, yet seeming half afraid

That some repulse, or bitter word, perchance
Would come from him to meet her fond advance.

“But, no. He drew her quickly to his breast;
And, while her fair head nestled there in rest,
His grief found vent in agonizing tears,
Such as are seldom wept in manhood’s years.

“Alas! I could endure to see no more,
My woe was greater than it was before
I knew what suffering had come to him.

“I left them thus. But memory grows dim
Regarding all that happened from that day
Till weeks—yes, months, of shadows passed
away.

“I vainly thought I could be strong and brave,
But fever brought me very near the grave,
And I did little else than moan and rave,
And wish for death to set my spirit free.

“But such release was not in store for me.

“Slowly, yet surely, health to me returned;
But ere it did so, my poor Ronald learned
Lucinda’s heart was aching like his own,
With wounds to be endured with wordless moan.

“We met at last. Kind Heaven, can I tell
Our bitter anguish when we said farewell!

“One instant, he was begging me to flee
With him to some far land across the sea,
Pledging his life and love to me till death,
Then changed his tone, before another breath,
Entreating me, with tears, to help him do
His duty, and to his marriage vow be true!

“Yet, thrice he sought me—thrice, we said
farewell,
For love had cast on both its witching spell!
What might have happened—ah! I dare not
think.

Full well I know I stood upon the brink
Of infamy and ruin. So I fled—

At midnight's hour, crept softly from my bed,
And, ere the morning dawned, was miles away
From those I loved, and where I longed to stay.

"Aunt Esther, years have passed since that
sad day,

And yet my soul goes out with longing cry
To my lost love! With him to live or die
Is more than Heaven is to sinful me!

"Now, feeling thus, should I return, or flee
Still farther from the tempter's luring voice,
At sound of which my spirit would rejoice,
In spite of all the teachings of my youth,
And innate love of purity and truth?"

Lucinda paused. She could no longer speak.
A tear dropped softly down on either cheek.
She clasped the pillar, where the brier grew,
And turned her mournful face away from view.

"My darling child," the other gently said,
"Three years are in the past since here you fled,
And, until recently, you seemed content
In this your voluntary banishment.

Why grow you restless now? I am the same
As when for refuge to my heart you came.

Indeed, your thoughtful care has made you
dearer,

And to my life each year has brought you nearer.

"Our home is not a grand one, it is true,
But it can well sustain and shelter you;
And I can gratify your girlish pride
In dress and books, nor need you leave my side.
Can take you little journeys now and then,
And let you rest when we are home again.
Now, why refuse to share my ample purse
And go to Clyde to be a servant-nurse,
Or reader (sure I know not which is worse)
To some capricious invalid, who knows
Naught of another mortal's ills or woes?"

Where you will never rest by night or day,
And where you only go that you may say
That you are independent on your pay?"

"No, aunt; it is the demon of unrest
That has, at last, found lodging in my breast,
Which causes me to yearn for something new!
But I, perhaps, will soon return to you,
Quite thankful that I have a friend, so true!
I feel a danger waiting very near,
And that is why I wish to go from here
To where I am unknown. A low estate
Will not fulfill the dreams which come of late."

"What dreams, Lucinda?" Esther asked.

"Dreams that I met my Ronald; that I basked
In the full sunlight of his happy face
And on his bosom found a resting-place.
Aunt Esther, keep me not. I am not strong.
If he should seek me, it might lead to wrong.
I know I should be powerless to flee
If he should come as in my dreams to me;
For I am far less reconciled to-day
To my sad fate than when I came away.

"O, I have thought of him these weary years,
Grief-bowed and weeping bitter, scalding tears!
As one grows tender to a wounded dove,
So martyrdom has added to my love,
And all my soul goes reaching out to him."

"Hush! hush! my child, that is a sinful
whim,"

Returned Aunt Esther. "It is brooding long
That leads you to conclusions which are wrong.
This Ronald seeks you not; hence it is plain
That he has now accepted all the pain
That parting brought. Perhaps has ceased to
yearn,

Or even care, my child, for your return.
For, fickle man can well accommodate

Himself to any path, marked out by fate.
Only we, women, poor duped creatures, grieve
For buried love, and we alone believe
That such love is immortal—lives again
Beyond this world of pain. 'Tis seldom men
Sigh for the happiness that they have missed,
And constancy for them does not exist.

"Advice is seldom heeded; yet I say,
'Tis sinful thus to wear your life away,
Mourning for what can never be your own.
Nor need you always walk your path alone.
The world has many Ronalds—men as true
As he, who, in revenge, has wounded you.
You think you suffer, dear, and yet the wife
That is unloved has far the saddest life.
And I had such a thankless fate as that,
With all the desolation it begat."

"What!" cried Lucinda. "You, Aunt Esther,
you
For whom I thought its sweetest flowers grew?"

"Yes, even I! I was an unsought bride.
But love with me was greater far than pride.
Your uncle wooed and won me, ere he knew
That later love, which upward springing threw
Its clinging tendril round his fickle heart.
He asked release, and begged that we might part.

"I could not, would not, let him go from me;
The very thought was intense misery.
And so I held him firmly to his vow—
God only knows how I regret it now!
For never did his wounded pride unbend.
He was my husband, yet was not my friend.

"I lived my life alone, and learned to hide
My misery when he was by my side.

"Indifference, my child, is worse than hate.

"He took the burden up, not very late;
And soon its weight he did not seem to mind.

“ God keep you, dear, from pining, as I pined,
For love and sympathy—one little word
Of true devotion that I never heard !
In fact, his tone and look were seldom sweet,
With loving care, to even Marguerite.
He was a toiler ; but his only aim
Was to acquire a literary fame ;
And faithfully he labored to that end.
He often saw the night with day-light blend
Before he thought to lay aside his pen,
And in an hour was at his work again.

“ Reward of labor was to him denied ;
For he was stricken down in manhood’s pride.
All loveless he had lived—and thus he died.

“ But while upon his brow the death-dews lay,
The shadows from his soul were swept away.
He saw how hopeless my young life had been
And felt a deep repentance for the sin
Of having rendered it so valueless ;
Regretting that he could not make redress.

“ Among his letters, when they came to view,
Was one which I would like to read to you.

“ It is an hour before the stage is due ;—
If you would hear it, come into my room.
It tells of one who rose above life’s gloom,
And hid a buried love with fragrant bloom.
Her brave example ought to make you strong
To do the right and to reject the wrong.”

Lucinda followed dumbly. Such despair
As hers, she thought, no other heart could share.

The letter had no date or even head ;
Nor was it signed ; and thus is how it read :

“ Why bring back the dead past, when its struggles
are o’er ?

It is only a corpse, and is silent and cold !
Far better to rest in its grave evermore !

Far too sacred its story to be even told !

We have met and have loved, as a thousand have
done ;

We have met and have parted, as thousands may
do ;

We have known all the joy that by loving is
won ;

We have felt all the pain that despair ever
knew.

Time, the healer, has watered the grave of our
love,

And in silence it sleeps 'neath the emerald sod.

It was born of the angels—its home is above !

'Twas a love such as spirits may give to their
God !

It is dead, yet immortal—the earthly at rest

In its grave, never more to be rosy and warm ;

But its spirit will live in the realms of the blest,

And will watch, from its haven, the mouldering
form.

“ I knew not when I met you, your honor was
pledged

To another ; nor asked—so the fault was my own.

Our two souls by our friendship securely seemed
hedged

And how love took possession by neither is
known.

Then I dared not to ask, lest the answer might
blight

All my hopes of the future, most dazzlingly fair ;

But chose rather to dream in Love's beautiful
light,

And thus laid for my soul a temptation and
snare.

“ And this might, in a manner, excuse me from
blame—

But the error was mine, and still mine—let it be.

I will bear all my portion of sorrow and shame,
If a shame, in our past, the great Father may
see!

“You were stronger, ah! maybe, were better
than I;

For while I was in darkness, your duty was plain;
And you turned a deaf ear to your soul's longing
cry,

And your pleading to me, I thank God, not in
vain.

“Ah! you took my two hands, white and cold
as the dead,

In your own, not a whit the less icy and white,
And, with tears in your voice, in hoarse accents
you said:

‘O, my Bonnibel, help your poor Max to do right;’

“I was weak at the moment—the words made
me strong;

And, although my racked spirit was writhing in
pain,

Never soul, held in bondage by mine to the
wrong,

Should cry out for its freedom and yet cry in
vain!

“You remember the parting—its woe and
despair!

At the last, I was stronger and braver than you.
You had shown where we stood and what foot-
falls were there,

And my pathway, though rugged, was plain to
my view.

“I was gone, ere you dreamed it, and miles
lay between.

Far away, among strangers, henceforth I would
roam.

Nevermore would I gaze on the beautiful scene

Of the land that I loved and the place I called home !

“ Oh how often I fainted, God only can know !
How I prayed I might die that my soul might be free !

But my duty, a star, showed my feet where to go,
And the angels kept guard and a watch over me !

“ To the soul that has fought with temptation
and sin
And has conquered, though wounded almost to
its death,

Comes the angel of peace, and will hover within
Till the wounds are all healed by her sweet,
loving breath.

“ She has dwelt in my bosom this many a year,
And I know that our parting has been for the
best ;

For we buried our love, while it still was so dear,
And thus made it immortal, like souls that are
blest.

Had it died at our feet, of unkindness, neglect ;
Had indifference wounded its heart to the core,
And we buried it gladly, we could not expect
It to live with the angels, in bliss, evermore.

“ That is all of the story, known only to two,
And its moral is clear as the light of the sun :
Keep the star of your duty forever in view
And sweet Peace will, at last, to your bosom be
won.

But 'tis only by sorrow such lessons are taught,
And I doubt if our story, explicitly told,
With our every struggle, temptation and thought,
Would its moral to any weak mortal unfold.

“ Would it not, in its penning, be placing our
feet
In the slippery paths, we have sought so to shun ;
At a time, when a conquest o'er self is complete,

When the battle is fought and the victory won?

“Rather let us go down to our graves all unsung,

Let our story die with us, unknown to the world,
Than our souls by temptation again should be
 wrung,

And ourselves from the paths of strict duty be
 hurled.”

The reading ceased. Lucinda raised her head,
And trembled on her lips a wistful sigh.

“The story reads like mine,” she softly said.

“But she was truer, nobler, far than I!”

CHAPTER II.

A LUMBERING stage-coach, dirt-begrimed and old,

Yet showing faded tints of red and gold,
With dashing sweep, up to the farmhouse rolled ;
The driver, grasping hard the reins, with " whoa !"
In most decided tones, as if to show
His lean and sad-eyed steeds were hard to hold.

" Good-bye, Lucinda," said a gentle voice.

" If you find happiness, I shall rejoice.

But if, as I much fear the case will be,

The servitude but brings you misery,

Remember love and welcome waits with me."

The other hoarsely said :

" Dear aunt, good-bye !"

Yet this was uttered with a gasping sigh,
Although her gratitude voiced no reply.

But swiftly down the garden path, she went,
Fearing her unshed tears might find a vent,
If she should utter but another word ;

For, even then, her drooping eyes were blurred
With moisture, as they sought the ground.

She gained the faded cushions with a bound,

The driver straightened up and made a dip
Into the air, and flourish with his whip ;
And forward sprang the horses with a will,
Quite briskly trotting till they crossed the rill ;
But slacked their pace before they reached the
hill,

Then crept along, as stage-coach horses do,
Until some town or city comes in view.

The glory of the spring was everywhere.

'Twas breathed forth in the sweetness of the air ;
Reflected from the cloud-flecked skies of blue,
And from the rippling water's deeper hue.
It glistened in the thorn's sweet, snowy flowers ;
And in the may-blooms, falling down in showers,
When stirred by gusts of wind, which bore along
The blossom's fragrance and the wild birds' song.

The scene was ever changing. Willows threw
Their shadows where the yellow cowslips grew
Beside the placid pools ; and near to these
Were less adventurous oaks and other trees ;
And, here and there, were piles of maple keys.
The dutchmen's-breeches bent above the rills ;
The pink arbutus trailed adown the hills ;
And modest violets, both white and blue,
Which everywhere in great abundance grew,
Their sweet perfume upon the breezes threw.

Lucinda's gaze went roaming, on, and on,
From hill to valley and from field to town ;
From happy bird to faith-inspiring bloom ;
While she sat wondering if e'er the gloom
Of her life's winter could be swept away,
And on her hopeless youth, dawn blooming May.

She was the only passenger that day,
And her wild thoughts had ample chance for play.

The long hours passed ; but none too soon.
A dinner at a country inn at noon
Was all the incident, unless we add
The change of horses, which was had.

As sunset neared, the hills became more steep ;
And the ravines proportionately deep.
Then came a table-land, from which high plain
Was seen, beyond the fields of growing grain,
A winding river. On the other side,
Arose the houses of the village Clyde,
Which nestled in a valley ; and away
Toward the west, a range of mountains lay.

The Edgeworth place was far the grandest
there,
The grounds were laid out with much taste and
care;
The house was large, and built for sun and air;
And luxury apparent everywhere.

The sun still lingered in the glowing west,
And hung suspended o'er a mountain's crest,
When Jehu dashed up at a break-neck rate,
And reined his steeds quite near a garden gate.
Then to the one lone passenger, he cried,
Or rather bawled out:

“This is Edgeworth, Clyde.”

At last! Lucinda caught her breath and sighed;
Then she began to wonder at the freak,
That led her thus in servitude to seek
A home, where no one knew or cared for her.
A feeling — almost shame began to stir
Within her bosom at the very thought.
She only as a servant had been sought
At Edgeworth.

Once, urged on by discontent,
She, reckless, answered an advertisement.
A reader, nurse, companion—all
In one, was wanted at the “Hall.”
A correspondence followed, at the end
Resulting in her quitting her good friend,
And going out with eager hope to find
A happier and more contented mind.

She passed up to the house, through lilac-trees
Which gave their spring-like odor to the breeze,
And filled her with a longing for the farm—
So quiet, and so sheltered from the barm
That well she knew was waiting her outside—
It might be in that very house at Clyde.

Lucinda Treverton was on her card.

A servant took it, looking at her hard,
With something of a sneer upon his face,
As if she sought to rise above her place.

He left her standing in the hall alone,
The sun had set. Its light no longer shone
In level beams of crimson and of gold
Through transom windows. Never very bold,
Lucinda now stood trembling in the gloom
And ghostly twilight of the stifling room;
Wishing she might retrace her steps and flee
Before another saw her misery.

A door unclosed. A sheen of golden hair
And snowy robes flashed out upon the air.
A lady, fair and young, was standing there.

"My aunt is ill," in measured tones she said,
"And I am here to answer in her stead.
I am her niece—arrived but yesterday
Quite unexpected. Yet I know the way
Up to her maid's apartment.

"So your name
Is Treverton! Familiar whence I came
But not of the same family, I know."

Lucinda reeled, as if a sudden blow
Were dealt her by some unknown, unseen foe.
How well she knew that face! It was the one
By whom her happiness had been undone—
There stood the wife of Ronald,—her own Ronald
Dean!

Her sight grew dim, and lights of red and
green
Mixed with a midnight blackness, whirling, flew
Across her vision, disappeared from view,
And ghostly gloom enveloped her once more.
Then, with a thud, she dropped down to the
floor.

The other screamed ere taking time for
thought

That such was the revenge that she had sought—
Revenge because she found, to her heart's cost,
That Ronald still was mourning for the lost.

Again the door unclosed, and Ronald Dean
Quite suddenly appeared upon the scene,
Heading a crowd of servants, all intent,
On learning what that scream of terror meant.

"Lucinda Treverton!" he hoarsely cried,
And in an instant knelt him at her side;
Then raised and drew her head close to his breast,
The place where he had hoped that it might rest.

"What means this, Edith; whence and where
and how

Came she to be as we both see her now?"

Thus spoke up Ronald, and his flashing eyes
Showed plainly that he would not list to lies
Or to equivocations for a fact.

And so, to seem quite candid and exact,
She frankly said:

"This girl is aunty's maid,
Now just arrived. Housed, fed and paid
She will be as the others were. Afraid
Am I that she is ill. She spoke no word,
Nor did she seem as if she even heard
When I, at aunty's bidding, came to show
Her to her room.

"Of course, I could not know
She was the friend you loved so long ago.
How could I dream Lucinda Treverton
And aunty's unknown serving-maid were one?
Don't look at me as though I were to blame!
I knew not she was coming, till she came.
I did hear aunty say a maid was hired,
But at the time I felt so very tired,
I gave the matter not a second thought—
Nor do I really see just why I ought!
It was her card that first revealed her name,

Though I could not believe she was the same
Lucinda Treverton that you once knew."

Ronald responded not. His arms he threw
About the girl with loving tenderness
That might almost be called a mute caress,
And bore her from the stifling air and gloom,
Straight to the large and airy drawing-room.

Here Edith interposed:

"My dear," said she,
"Her glance should not rest first on you and me."

"Quite right," he made reply, though moodily.
Then to the female servants spoke, and said:
"I pray you put my little friend to bed.
She was my schoolmate, loving, true and dear.
I know not what reverses bring her here
To be aunt Laura Edgeworth's waiting-maid.
But treat her kindly—you shall be repaid."

A stress upon the latter words was laid,
Entreaty showing in his eager eyes.

The servants, very sharp and worldly-wise,
Passed glances of intelligent surprise;
Yet the command was quietly obeyed.
Lucinda to her chamber was conveyed
And, colorless and silent as the dead,
Was placed upon a pretty, white-draped bed.

A lamp upon the marble mantle burned,
When consciousness at length, to her returned,
To realize that, with departing day,
Her hope of restful peace had passed away—
That in the morn, she must her steps retrace,
Since she could never dwell at Edgeworth place.

Ah! better far were beggary, or sin,
Than from a soul of Edith's kith or kin
To take so little as a mouldy crust!

The girl's proud head was humbled to the
dust.

Regretting bitterly her headstrong will,

For Edith's cruel words had sent a thrill
Of shame vibrating to her fingers' ends,
How much she longed to see her farm-house
friends!

And as she thus, repentant, moaning, lay
Her tea was brought. She ordered it away,
Demanding that she should be left alone.

The servants, nettled at her haughty tone,
Withdrew; yet going, heard a smothered moan,
Something between a sob and gasping sigh;
And so they half forgave the tart reply.

CHAPTER III.

THE clocks were telling of the midnight hour.
The great bell, swinging in the church tower,
At sleeping Clyde, announced a new-born day,
Though still unheralded its faintest ray,
Before Lucinda gained the strength to rise,
And bathe her throbbing brow and burning eyes.

What should she do—await the coming light,
Or steal away amid the gloom of night?
For go she must. She could not bear to hear,
One other time, the cold, malicious sneer
Of Ronald's wife;—to know he might be near,
And yet to her no nigher than a stranger.

How she had come upon the very danger
That she had sought so zealously to flee!
Alas! what was the end of this to be?

Then pride came, bringing strength to her
relief.

What had she done to steal forth like a thief,
While sleep locked up the senses of her foe?
No. She would go as honest people go—
Seen fully in the clear, broad light of day,
Telling them frankly that she would not stay.

The moon arose—a pale and waning moon.
The hours were speeding, 'twould be morning
soon.

She must be calm to meet it when it came;
Nor let her face tell aught of grief or shame.

She paced the floor; backward and forward
turned,
But still with fever heat her eyelids burne

Although the blood receded from her lips
And they were cold as were her finger-tips.

She next unclosed a window; for the air
Was growing hot and almost stifling there.
The window opened on a portico,
With steps, at either end, that led below,
And overlooked a garden at the rear
Of Edgeworth Hall, where blooming fruit-trees
were.

The cool, delicious breeze brought their perfume

Up to the window of that stifling room,
 wooing the girl to spend among the flow'rs
The minutes of night's few remaining hours.

She took her wraps that she might not retrace
Her steps before she left that hateful place.
She could be stronger—could feel more at home
Out 'neath the Heaven's blue encircling dome!
And so she went.

The many walks between
The orchard trees were broad and smooth and
clean,

And here and there was placed a garden seat—
The whole a beautiful, retired retreat.

On, on, Lucinda sped, like bird on wing,
Nor paused till she had reached a grapevine
swing

That swayed beside a narrow, purling stream—
The very spot to dream a lover's dream.

The distance she had gone, she did not know,
It seemed to her a full half mile or so,
And she was panting with the rapid walk.

Into the swing she dropped to think and talk
Of matters to herself, as girls will do.
About the vine one slender arm she threw
And leaned her head against it, while her look
Wandered in wistful longing to the brook,

Whose gleaming waters murmured of a rest
That might be found upon their cooling breast.

When left by life-storms, desolate and lone,
Who has not heard the waters' wooing tone
And felt a restless impulse to obey,
When "Find a rest with me," they seemed to
say?

So felt Lucinda as she slowly swayed
Upon the grapevine in that silent glade.

"Alas!" she mused, "from home and friends
I flee

Because my Ronald comes in dreams to me;—
Only to find an unrelenting foe,
Who deals my wounded soul a second blow!
Ah! me, how biting was her smiling sneer!
I wonder if poor Ronald, too, is here!
I seemed to feel, though sealed my eyes, and
weak,

His breath one single instant on my cheek—
One moment I, of joy's elixir, drank,
Before my life became an utter blank.
It was a dream, perhaps. Naught but the hate
Of most relentless and most cruel fate,
Could lead me to him in my low estate!"

"Nay, it was a loving fate," a soft voice said,
"That to her spirit's mate my darling led."

Lucinda, startled, quickly turned her head;
And there, five steps away, stood Ronald Dean,
With closely folded arms and quiet mien,
His handsome face with eager hope alight,
And love-lit eyes that gleamed like stars at
night.

"Ronald! How came you here?" Lucinda
cried.

"I followed you, my darling," he replied.
"I can endure this woe no longer. I
Will cut my bonds, or, ere the morning, die!"

He forward sprang and kneeled him at her feet—

She had already left her grapevine seat
And seemed about to flee—she knew not where;
But felt it was improper to be there.

“Stay! stay!” he cried, “one moment, dear!
This once you must, and shall, my pleading
hear!

The storm that wrecked your life wrecked mine
as well!

Of my heart’s pain, nor tongue nor pen can tell!
Though I have tried to walk by duty’s light,
I find myself amid the gloom of night,
Not knowing where to go, or turn to flee
The keen remorse that is pursuing me!
For through the years I’ve been by Edith’s side
No moment has my soul not called its bride!

“And you have dreamed of me! How sweet
it seems

That I have not been banished from your dreams.
Indeed, my love, if thought can know no space
Or bonds, mine had with you a dwelling-place.”
And yet I sought you not. I felt that fate
Would lead us two together, soon or late.”

A heavy pain tugged at Lucinda’s heart
As low she said:

“We only meet to part.

Too honored is my noble father’s name
For me to link it to a life of shame!
Seek you your wife! I go back whence I came
As soon as morning dawns. Why then prolong
This sad, sad meeting? Let us flee the wrong
Before the little strength we have is spent,
Remembering that sin brings punishment;
And though we tread awhile its blooming path,
We cannot hide us from the storm-cloud’s wrath.

“You have a wife and, sister writes, a child.

So Heaven on your loneliness has smiled.
Had I a darling bright-eyed boy, my own,
In honest wedlock, he would half atone
For all the anguish that I have endured.
Ere this, his love, my bleeding wounds had
cured.

Though in the whole great world, naught else
were mine,

I would no longer at my fate repine.
He would make up my little world; with love
Would light my grov'ling thoughts to things
above

This shallow life to God's eternal throne!"

She tearful, paused. Her words were like a
moan;

And Ronald answered only by a groan.

"Such joy is yours, but I am all alone!"

She added in a low heart-broken tone.

"And so am I," he said. "The mother's
heart

Claims of his love, each parcel and each part;
And I, who give her none, must leave the whole
Of her child's love to satisfy her soul.

E'en that suffices not, and so we live
Unhappily, since I have none to give.

She knew this ere we wedded, for a fact;

Yet keeps a jealous watch on every act

And word of mine—a cruel espionage

That thwarts love's purposes in every age.

"Though held by prison walls a man may be,
Chained in a dungeon, yet his love is free.

The fetter never, never has been wrought
That binds his heart's affection and his thought.

"Lucinda, all my soul goes out to you!

I can not, will not, bid a long adieu!

And since we may not live in love, then why
May we not here, together, darling, die!"

Lucinda with a shudder made reply :

“It is the tempter, Ronald, urging you
To be to your own better self untrue !
Think how our friends would grieve—the world
deride

Our hopeless love and double suicide !
It was a weakness—say that it is gone !
Take up your cross, my friend, and bear it on !
Help will yet come as surely as the dawn.
Now, we must part—and so good-bye ! good-
bye ! ”

What piercing pain was in her gasping sigh,
And oh ! how vice-like was the icy band
Around her heart, as Ronald reached his hand,
And said in broken tones :

“ If you so will
So shall it be. Grief blights, but does not kill,
I have been told ; and we will live. Good-bye.”

He pressed her hand ; then turned and walked
away

So rapidly, she could not bid him stay
Were such her wish ; for he was lost to view
Before a second gasping breath she drew.

Her strength was gone. She could not reach
her seat ;

Nor could she hold herself upon her feet.

She tottered ; then dropped to the ground,
and there

She, moaning, lay in bridgeless, blank despair.
A numbness crept about her heart, and death
Seemed to be struggling with her for her breath.
She could not rise—she was so faint and weak ;
And, though she tried, no sentence could she
speak.

Would morning find her thus, or death decide
The better love, and show him why she died ?

How long upon the dew-wet ground she lay

She knew not. Ages seemed to pass away
Before a coming footstep could be heard ;
And even then no single muscle stirred,
For she, alas ! was powerless to stir ;
And Ronald, it was he, bent over her,
With startled cry, and quickly raised her head.
Her pallor was the pallor of the dead.

“ Fate wills you to be mine, my love,” he said.

He took her in his arms in fond embrace,
He chafed her hands, rained kisses on her face,
And wooed her back to life by loving tones,
Which found no answer, but in dreary moans ;
Yet she did not repel him, when he pressed
Her closely to his warm and throbbing breast.

“ Rouse up, my darling, my own spirit bride !
An hour hence a train goes out of Clyde,
The world is all asleep, except the few
Who go a-journeying as will we two,
For O, Lucinda, here and now, I swear
By all our blighted love and blank despair,
That life or death we two henceforth will share.”

Lucinda raised her head, but did not speak,
Though tears were dropping softly on each
cheek.

She would no longer seek to strive with fate.
Far better were the cold world's sneers and hate,
With Ronald's precious love all for her own,
Than have its praise with woe like she had
known.

Weak moments come into the lives of all—
Some, stumbling, keep their feet, while others
fall ?

But of their strength and goodness who shall
say.

A lesser stumbling block was in their way.

About her slender figure, Ronald drew
The wraps, damped by a contact with the dew.

But as he felt her tremble 'neath her cloak
He knew her won, although no word she spoke ;
And when the train pulled out of sleeping Clyde,
He was thereon ; Lucinda by his side.

CHAPTER IV.

THE rising sun shot up its lurid rays
And all the heavens seemed to be ablaze,
The glow encircling every tree and flower ;
Then heavy, threatening clouds began to lower—
Across its disc they threw a somber pall,
And soon a dreary rain began to fall.

Perhaps it was through loving pity, fate
That morning willed that Edith should sleep
late.

Though she had not awakened through the
night,

Her dreams had been of loneliness and fright.
She had been wandering through thorns and
slush—

Had seen upon a stretch of leafless brush,
The waters of a mighty river rush ;
Had tried to gain a footing somewhat higher,
But found her way impeded by the mire.
Above her head had been an inky sky,
And lurid lightning had gone flashing by ;
The roaring thunder falling on her ears
Had filled her shrinking soul with direful fears.
She had been all alone. Amid the storm,
Her eager eyes had seen no living form.
No bird or beast in all that dreary waste,
Or sign of habitation had been traced.

Though she had known she dreamed and tried
to shake
The nightmare from her, yet she could not
wake.

'Twas only after hours of fright and grief

That sweet oblivion had brought relief—
A restful slumber which, at best, was brief.

When she was roused, the pattering of rain.
Was the first sensing of her waking brain,
And brought renewal of her dreamland pain.

E'en then, she was alone. No head had
pressed

The pillow where her husband's was to rest.

The lamp was burning still; its sickly glare
But adding gloom to that already there.

She had retired before the time to go,
Leaving her husband on a portico,
In full enjoyment of a good cigar,

While listlessly he glanced from star to star,

Still travel-worn and weary, she had slept;

Though he, outside, a lonely vigil kept,

Nor sought his sleeping wife the livelong night.

No wonder that her dreams were those of fright!

She looked about. She had slept all alone!

The dawning truth elicited a moan.

Gone from her side all night—the other there;

What if they two had met? O, dark despair!

She dropped back on her pillow. All her life.

Since she had promised to be Ronald's wife,

Passed like a vision, whirling through her brain.

Her sin had brought a punishment and pain

Already, though yet scarcely realized;

For she had seen go from her what she prized.

Remorse came to her. She had thought to
show

His former love as having fallen low

Into a servant's berth—a female tramp;

And, by her haughty sneers, bring chill and
damp

To blight the love-blooms of her rival's heart.

This she had planned with woman's jealous art.

If she had only sent Lucinda word,

When she had first of the engagement heard,
That she and Ronald both were there at Clyde,
The pair, perhaps, would not have thus been
tried.

Rather than come, Lucinda would have died.
This Edith knew. But, in her jealous wrath,
She held the knowledge that across her path
The lowly nurse had come in days gone by.
A fatal error, and she knew not why
She had committed it. Ah! crazed was she
With hopeless love and mad, wild jealousy!
Poor thing! She knew how sad it was to rest
A loving head upon a throbbing breast
That gave no throb for her; and in her woe
She aimed to strike his love a cruel blow,
Just as we all are wont to strike at those
Who strike at us, by giving blows for blows—
Blows that we shame to think of in a day,
When reason has once more regained its sway.

While Edith Dean lay thus with half closed
eyes,

Dreading to shake the stupor off and rise,
A door opened, and in walked a child,
With ruby lips as sweet as ever smiled;
And such a sheen of fluffy, golden hair
As dropped upon his brow, so broad and fair,
Could never grace a better modeled head.
His baby-lips wore just a tint of red,
His hazel eyes repeated every word he said—
Such eager and expressive eyes were they,
Their glances frank and open as the day.

Behind him came his nurse—a pretty maid,
Whose eyes drooped shyly, as if half afraid
That she was venturing beyond her place.

The boy ran in and touched his mother's face,
Arousing her from the awakened thought
Of that dark morn and all the woe it brought.

“ He wanted ma and pa, and would not wait,”
The servant said : “ Besides it is so late ! ”

“ Where, then,” was sharply asked, “ is Mr.
Dean ? ”

“ Indeed,” was answered, “ he has not been
seen

Since you retired last night. Miss Treverton,
I heard the kitchen people say, is gone.”

“ Gone ! ” Edith looked up, dumbly asking,
“ Where ? ”

“ None know. The room was open ; she not
there.

(The lady clinched her hands in blank
despair.)

“ But she can not be far. Her trunk is here.
In fact, her home they tell me, is quite near—
A matter like of fifty miles or so.

They all are wondering what made her go.”

The trembling of her form, she could not
hide,

But Edith Dean possessed a world of pride.
She would not let the gaping servants know
That she was fearful of a heavy blow,
Perhaps disgrace, about to fall, and so
She said :

“ The girl was once quite well to do.
She felt a hurt at meeting those she knew,
And that is why, I think, she went away.
Then I remember hearing Ronald say
He would have business out of town to-day.
I quite forgot it when I first awoke.”

She now turned to her child and smiling
spoke :

“ My Allan’s mamma had a nice long rest.
Kiss me, my pet, and say whom you love best ! ”

She raised and drew him closely to her breast,
And held him with a long, fond pressure there.

His love, at least, another should not share.

“ My mamma, papa and my Mabel too,”
Was the quick answer that the question drew ;
“ But whom the best ? ”

“ I love my Mabel best.”

“ Take him,” she said ; “ ’tis time that I were
dressed ; ”

And coldly put the little one aside.

Her jealous love was nowhere satisfied.

“ Alas ! ” she cried, when they had gone
away,

“ My sin has brought me nothing worth the pay.

One woman has my husband’s heart. Alas !

Another has my child’s ! As in a glass

I see my punishment : I am alone ! ”

And from her pale lips issued moan on moan.

Ere eventide, the Dean disgrace was known.

CHAPTER V.

RONALD TO EDITH.

" I WRITE you this letter with feelings of pain,
For my struggle to do my whole duty was vain.

" O, you knew from the first, I was bankrupt
of heart,
And of husband's affection could give you no
part;

Yet I hoped to be true in each act, if not thought;
And that time, long ere this, some contentment
had brought.

" But, alas! when I saw my lost darling last
night,
As she lay so nigh death, all silent and white,
Knowing well 'twas my act that had brought her
such woe,

I gave up the struggle—and better 'twere so,
For your life without love is wretched and lone,
And, by living a lie, I am wrecking my own.

" As my act is desertion you soon can be free,
As I wish, by divorce, from unfortunate me;
And I leave you the half of my means and estate,
On condition you seek not to alter my fate.

" You will find consolation in Allan, our son,
Who will love you far better than I could have
done;
But I trust, in some future, will come to your
life

All the love that you long for—the joys of a
wife.

For you are so loving, so beautiful, true,

That a heart, yet unclaimed, must do homage to
you ;

And, somewhere in the world, is a spirit in wait,
For a meeting to claim you, its darling and
mate.

“ Just a word of the boy—tell him not, while
so young,

The disgrace that the world will roll under its
tongue

As a morsel most sweet. No, tell him, instead,
That the father who loves him is named with the
dead.

But when crowned with young manhood, the
story disclose

Of his father's disgrace, his love and his woes,
As a warning to him, that he never may try
To be honest and truthful by living a lie.

“ I would ask your forgiveness—alas ! but my
sin

Is too glaring, and naught but your hatred can
win.

But when time shall have softened the blow to
your heart,

You will pity the wretch who of sin found a
part

Where soever he turned, though he wished to
be true ;

And I trust will be glad that he bade you adieu—
That a gulf, dark and bridgeless, is lying
between

Yourself and our Allan, and

“ Your

“ RONALD DEAN.”

Such was the letter that next morning came
To add a pang to Edith's woe and shame.

Far more, perhaps, than either sinner, she
Felt the disgrace—the stain that could not be
Blotted from their fair name and memory.
The sin of poor Lucinda, she felt sure
She wrought, and therefore lying at her door.

Though Edith had done wrong, there was in
her

A great nobility of character.
Her love for Ronald Dean had wrought
A cruel selfishness of act and thought;
Because she wished to claim him all her own,
Had tried his worshipped idol to dethrone,
By most unworthy measures, gaining so
The little of his love he could bestow;
And, through a mad desire to know the worst,
Had sought to test his faith, and thus been
cursed.

But now she took herself to task, and in
Stern judgment sat upon her acts of sin.
Natures less nobly formed than hers had thrown
The blame upon the criminals alone,
And justified themselves because they saw
In all their acts, no one condemned by law.
But Edith Dean with nicer insight sought
To do strict justice to each act and thought
Of hers; for they the others' crimes had wrought.
Except for her, their lives had now been pure;
Nor need she such remorse and woe endure.

Upon the sheet she dropped her throbbing
head,
And though despair came with the lines just
read,
To make the restitution in her pow'r
Was her one wish in that dark, bitter hour.

"Why cry you, mamma?" little Allan said.

"Because your papa, darling mine, is dead!"
The mother whispered in a sobbing tone.

"And your poor mamma now is all alone."

"My papa dead!" The wistful eyes were raised

And in their depths, the lonely mother gazed.

"Did angels come to him the other night
While we all slept, and dress him up in white?
Give him a crown of gold and pretty wings?
And is he looking at us while he sings?"

"Alas! just how he went I do not know;
I was asleep and did not see him go."

"Then who has told you, mamma, he is dead?
The child with great persistence said.

"This letter, love, that came to me to-day."

"O, yes. The angels took my pa away
And God has sent a letter down to you!"

"Alas," groaned Edith, "would that it were
true!

My child!" she cried, and with a sudden zest
She clasped him to her wildly throbbing breast;
"I, too, will die unless you love me best!"

"Then God would send a letter down to me;
But I could read it not. I am too wee."
His eyes met hers frankly as he added: "So
I'd take it to my Mabel—she would know.
I hope the angels will not make her go."

The mother reeled, as if beneath a blow.
Her serving-maid had won her darling's heart
Away from her by sweet seductive art,
While she, who longed for love, as souls for
Heaven,

Was robbed of even what her child had given.

In that dark hour, she made a quick resolve—
She, too, would disappear and none should solve
The mystery of how or where she went,
Or know how any after-time was spent.
Her child was young—his little heart soon won
And she would win it as the girl had done.

His sole companion, she henceforth would be,
Their home some lonely cottage by the sea,
A spot where few would come, and none would
know

Aught of her short, unhappy life, or woe.
When domiciled, at length, she should be there
Then Edith Dean was lost in Edith Dare;
And Allan, never more should bear the name
Of him who linked it to a life of shame.
She would be dead to all; and Ronald free
To wed Lucinda, as he wished to be.

She touched a bell. The nurse in answer
came.

"I go to Summerville to-morrow. You must
stay

To care for aunty while I am away."

She said to Mabel: "Business takes me there.
Allan goes, too. You will not have that care."

"O, Mrs. Dean, do leave the baby! do!"

The girl exclaimed. "He sure will worry
you!"

But Edith answered kindly,

"Aunt will need

All of your time with me away. You read
Delightfully. Miss Treverton, I know,
Cannot surpass your tones, so sweet and low.
Right glad I am to leave you, while I go."

The flattery told, the girl was pleased, indeed,
And to the plan without demur agreed,
But hoped her charge would not be long away.

How long the mistress was not free to say.
Her business might detain her for a day
Or two, at Summerville; not more, and then—

The speaker paused. The girl supplied the
rest,

And so no further was the question pressed.

His Mabel never saw the child again.

CHAPTER VI.

THE level sun-rays on the hill-tops lay
When in the morning Edith went away,
In the same coach that brought Lucinda there.

The day was just as sweet and fair as that
On which her rival came ; but Edith sat
Among the faded cushions, heeding not,
In contemplation of her bitter lot,
The gay songs of the birds among the trees,
The bonny flowers and kisses of the breeze.

Her little son was sitting by her side,
Enticed there by the promise of a ride,
Yet fretful at the absence of his nurse.
Then he was sleepy, and that made him worse—
It being sooner than his rising time.
The mother soothed him with a nursery rhyme,
And soon he slept. But later when he woke,
“I want my Mabel!” were the words he spoke.

From Laura Edgeworth, Edith Dean had
trace

Of poor Lucinda’s former dwelling-place,
And her relations at the Brighton farm.
Now, Edith leaned her head against her arm,
And fell to wondering if she could face
The friends of one whom she had led to sin ;
And if the aunt would even let her in
When she should ask to be admitted there ;
For such a thing she was about to dare.
She had a message that she wished to send
To Ronald and Lucinda, through a friend,

Before she quitted home and those she knew
And disappeared from trace as well as view.

In time, the farm was reached, and Edith
stood,
Wrapped in the robes of lonely widowhood,
Beneath the wild sweet briar, and trembling
leant

Against a pillar, for her strength was spent;
And she, who till that moment, had been brave,
Was sinking 'neath the overwhelming wave
Of hopeless misery and glaring shame.

But to her side a sweet-faced woman came,
Who patted Allan's golden head and smiled.
Then to the mother said,

“Come in, my child;
'That you are ill is plainly to be seen.”

“You may not wish it. I am Edith Dean!”
The pale lips gasped; and Esther gave a start,
Clasping her hands in woe across her heart.

But Edith cried:

“O, do not drive me hence!
If in my power, I will make recompense
For all the wrong that I have done your niece.”

Then Esther waved her hand.

“I pray you cease,”
She said. “That you once wronged her may be
true,

But she has done a wicked wrong to you,
Which I cannot forgive. I loved her so;
And she has dealt to me the keenest blow
That could be hers to deal, or mine to feel.
I never even dreamed that she would steal
From my fond guardianship, to seek disgrace—
To meet a lover at the Edgeworth place,
And go with him without the marriage tie.”

“You wrong her, Mrs. Brighton—it is I
Who am to blame,” was Edith's sad reply.

“For I, who suffer most, can safely swear
That she could not have known our presence
there

When she set out for Clyde. We did not know
An hour before the starting, we would go.
We had been south. Already we had turned
Homeward, when by a telegram we learned
Of aunty’s illness, and concluded then,
As we might never have the chance again,—
To visit her, arriving there the day
Before your niece arrived.

“And now I pray
That you will hear my story to the end,
For I am miles away from any friend
Who would with patience listen and decide
Between us. Both of us, alas! were tried,
And both have sinned. My sin, I fear, is worse.
When my Aunt Laura told me of the nurse
She soon expected, I, in my jealous woe,
Was silent, for I wished to strike a blow
That she might feel who held my husband’s
heart.

I acted thus a most unworthy part—
One that I shame to tell. With haughty pride
I met her; and she fainted by my side.
Then Ronald came and she was borne away.
I marked his tenderness while thus she lay,
Limp, white, unconscious that she was caressed;
And then I knew that still he loved her best.

“I saw the two no more. Before the dawn,
My wicked blow recoiled, for they were gone.”

Said Mrs. Brighton:

“I appreciate
Your nobleness; far more of love than hate
Was in your sin. But it excuses not
Lucinda’s crime—that she should be a blot
Upon the honored name her father bore.”

“But list, you, madam, I would tell you more,”

Said Edith Dean. “I was, alas! the cause
Of all their disobedience to the laws.
I love her not! and yet, O, God, I trust
I yet possess the honor to be just.
I saw not with clairvoyant vision, all
The misery that would my acts befall;
Else I had walked my way alone, nor sought
To claim from Ronald Dean a word or thought
More than a friend or mere acquaintance ought.

“But Mrs. Dean comes of a haughty race.
She did not think Lucinda held a place
In rank beside her own. She sent for me;
And I, not knowing Ronald was not free,
Unsought, surrendered up to him the whole
Of my poor, loving, foolish heart and soul.

“His mother planned excursions for her guest,
And Ronald Dean’s politeness worked the rest
Of the misfortune. Not until it came
Heard I a mention of Lucinda’s name.
Then, madam, true as Heaven judges me,
I wished an instrument of peace to be;
And, though I loved him better than my life,
I would have bridged the gulf to make her wife
To Ronald Dean. But, no. I should not stir
To say the words explaining all to her.
He felt outraged; and when he saw me sad,
He laughing told me he was very glad
That she had thus released him from his vow,
Since he could wed ‘a better woman now.’

“I am but human, and I frankly own
I was made happy by his words and tone.
His mother, too, was almost wild with joy
At finding I had won her darling boy,
And hurried matters with an undue haste.

“But not till we were married did I taste

The bitter draught my sin had brewed for me ;
For then he mourned in wordless agony.
He blamed himself and me when she fell ill,
Declaring boldly that he loved her still.

“ O, Mrs. Brighton, could you only know
Of all my hours of bitterness and woe,
You would not curse me, though I dealt the blow
That you now stagger under.”

“ I have known
What 'tis to be most hopelessly alone,”
The other softly said. “ Go on. What more ? ”

“ Not much,” was the reply. “ In time, he wore
A look more cheerful, seeming quite content
When Allan to our lonely home was sent.
And now you know my sin and punishment.

“ Since Ronald Dean is nothing more to me,
It is my privilege to set him free—
The only restitution I can make.

“ Some time when better feelings shall awake,
The girl will write to you ; and then, I pray,
That you most kindly in an answer say
That Ronald Dean, her Ronald Dean is free
Of every tie that binds his faith to me ;
And that it is my wish he should reclaim,
By wedding her, the honor of her name.”

She turned her gaze toward a garden seat
Where little Allan sat with Marguerite,
Who had his lonely moments wiled away
By story-telling and some baby play.

“ He is my all,” she said. “ Thank God for him ! ”

Then Esther Brighton's eyes with tears grew dim.

“ I too, have been an idol worshipper—
Unloved. She is my all. Thank God for her ! ”

“ Ah ! ” questioned Edith, “ was your fate like mine ? ”

“Much so,” was answered. “What is it to pine

For love and sympathy full well I know,
Though life brought not to me that harder blow
That fell on you. But, oh! we suffer less,
Each chastened spirit will in time confess,
By blows that crushing fall, yet leaves us life
Than by a constant lash, and bitter strife
To flee the sorrows that we always meet
Where’er we turn our faces or our feet.

“My child was left no heritage of shame;
And yet to meet no father’s love she came.

“He crushed his heart beneath a weight of
pride,

Unsympathizing lived and loveless died.
I almost know, for truth, if fate had willed
That he should claim the other as his bride,
In after years, he would have wrung and chilled
Her heart, and she had been, as I was, tried.

“Believe me, dear, your lot is not the worst;
It is my poor Lucinda who is cursed.”

“But of that curse, I wrought the greater
share—

That brings the keenest pang I have to bear,”
Sobbed Edith Dean. “Had I been she,
I almost fear the curse would rest with me.
For always, madam, till my strength was tried,
I walked my path with ever conscious pride
In my nobility of character.

But, from my story, you can well infer
How meanly weak I am, and pity her,
Who tried still more than I, grew weak and fell.

“I leave my message and a long farewell.”
And Edith, sobbing turned, to go away.

But Esther interposed. “I pray you stay.
(The stage does not return to Clyde to-day)

Unless," she added, "You have relatives in town,

In which event, I'll gladly drive you down."

"I go no more to Clyde," said Edith Dean.

"Indeed, I soon shall put long miles between Myself and all that I have known or seen.

"I must remain among my friends, of course, Until the law shall grant the wished divorce; But not a moment longer will it be Than shall suffice by law to set him free; Then he shall never hear again of me.

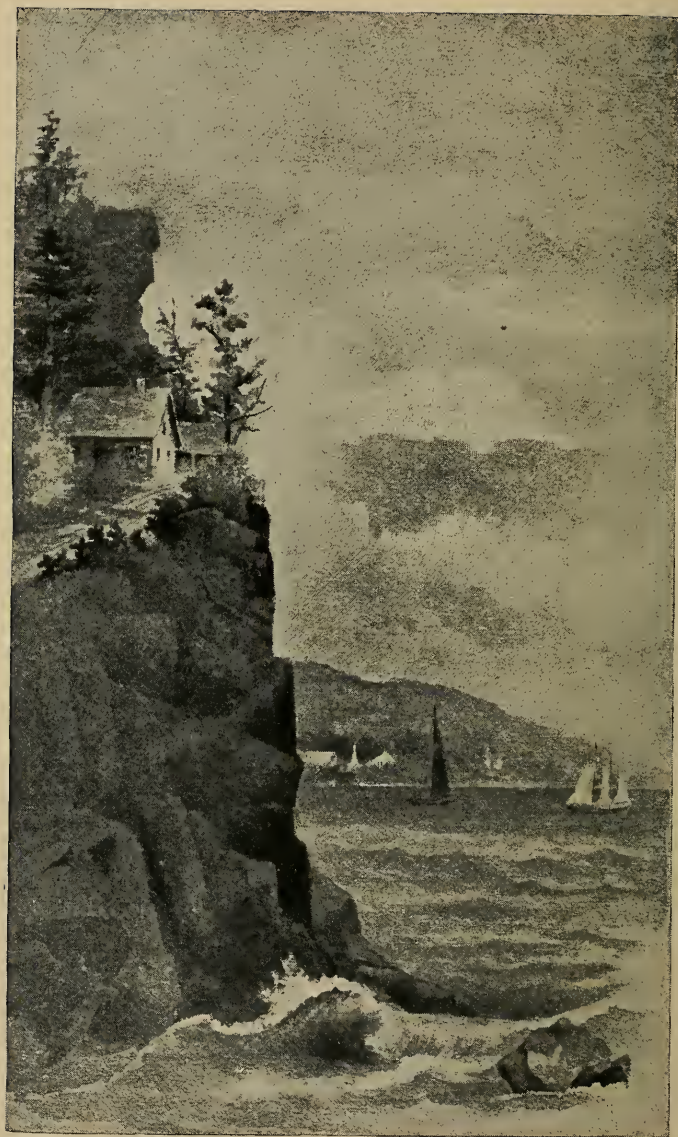
"A stranger, here I gladly will remain With you, until the leaving of a train; And you are very good, my friend, to be So kind to her who wrought your misery."

"The sin repented is atoned, my dear," Said Esther gently. "When you go from here You will be stronger far to bear your cross, And bow more meekly to your bitter loss, Than though your errors were all unconfessed And locked as secrets in your lonely breast.

Come in," she added, "dear, and try to rest."

Then to a cosy parlor led her guest, Seeking, by kindly act and woman's art, To soothe the lonely creature's aching heart.

'Twas midnight, and the outside world was still,
When Edith's train pulled out of Summerville;
But that sad evening at Brighton farm
Had not the least of joy nor most of harm,
Compared with those which had made up her life
Since she was Ronald Dean's unhappy wife.



EAGLE'S NEST.

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

A ROCK-BOUND coast, beside the restless sea ;
A narrow inlet making into land,
The bluffs on one side, rising bold and free—
The other bordered by a beach of sand.

High up a cottage stood, thence, looking down,
The steeples of a not far distant town
Embowered by trees, and flanked by fields of
green,
Which stretched far inland, could be plainly
seen.

The house was reached by one long, winding
road,
That led from town, a tasty, neat abode
Upon a fertile plateau, sheltered by
Rugged o'erhanging cliffs, that towered high
Above it, and which seemed to touch the sky.
Around it, hardy trees and flowers grew ;
And never was a grander, wider view
Than offered there. For miles and miles of
space
Of sea and land were seen from that sweet
place.

One seemed to live a life of romance there—
Almost beyond the world of sin and care ;
And nature in her each and every mood
Could better from the " Eagle's Nest " be viewed

Than elsewhere in the land. The raging blast
Which hurls the storm-clouds madly past ;
The thunder's music and the lightning's gleams ;
The drenching rains that feed the mountain
streams ;

The witching melody of summer hours ;
The breeze's kiss and sweet breath of the flowers ;
The language and the love-life of the birds ;
The matchless patience of the shepherd's herds ;
The star bespangled dome—all, all, were best
As studied from the cosy "Eagle's Nest."

Such was the home of lovely Edith Dare
And her one child, a boy with golden hair,—
A lad of seven years, to whom the sea
Seemed his own native element to be.

For Edith taught her son to row and swim
And on his little journeys went with him.

She taught him, too, with student's matchless
skill

All things which of the most importance are,
And he grasped knowledge with an eager will.
He soon could tell the distance to a star,
And knew how high upon the mountain's crest
Stood his own cottage home—the "Eagle's Nest."

Two people, well along in years, prepared
The daily food and for the dwelling cared ;
But Allan's love with them she never shared.
She thought and cared for him with tenderness
That claimed his every thought and fond caress.
In fact, the servants were so strange and old,
That Allan sought them not, and never told
His boyish dreams to them. By signs alone
Their mistress's wishes were to them made
known ;

And Allan looked on them with awe. His pride
It was to live close to his mother's side ;
And Edith's longing soul was satisfied.

She was a stranger there, and not a guest
E'er came by invitation to the "Nest."
If any called she sent her servants out
To greet and show such personage about;
Yet bidding them to make no note of her,
Thus leading all who came there to infer
That those old people owned the pretty home.
Though sometime they who chose for days to
 roam

Along the coast, returned with fairy tales
Of seeing little boats with snowy sails,
Upon the crested waves; or, swimming 'round,
Two lovely mermaids, golden-haired, they found.
And some had seen them scale the mountain's
 crest,

And take a refuge in the "Eagle's Nest."

But when they followed, they were met,
 forsooth,
By two old folks long parted from their youth,
Who seemed as owners there, and offered cheer,
Although no questions did they seem to hear.

And Edith smiled, for they who thus had
 come
Knew not the man and wife were deaf and
 dumb.

To keep her secret safe she had sought those
Two honest people, who could not disclose
Because they knew naught. Nor could hear
 nor speak.

And further information would not seek,
Since in that pretty home they were content,
And wondered not at her self-banishment.

It was a dangerous coast, and ships steered
 clear—

But few were known to make a landing near;
A sea-port twenty miles toward the north
Accommodating such as journeyed forth.

But hunters and romantic tourists strayed
Thither at times ; and they were well repaid
By choicest game, and views, forgotten not,
E'en though to live for ages were their lot.

“ My mamma,” will we always dwell up
here? ”

Asked Allan, late one warm September day.

“ I think so. Are you not contented, dear? ”

“ O, yes. But there are cities far away,
Filled with delightful things we never see.
I often think how glad my heart would be
To live in one of them a little while.”

“ My child,” said Edith, with a sweet, sad
smile

“ Though in your wish is nothing very strange,
Your heart would not be gladdened by the
change.

Out in the world are falsehood and deceit ;
There people grasp for gold, and, grasping,
cheat

Their dearest friends ; and aching hearts are
there ;

And wicked faces masks of goodness wear.

The rich in mansions hold their heads in pride,

The poor in want and misery abide.

Murder is frequent ; so is suicide.

The pureness of your soul would soon depart ;

And you would likely break your mother's heart,

By taking to yourself the loathsome sin

And vices found amid the city's din ”

He drew a sigh and said :

“ If that is so

Dear mamma, I will wish no more to go.”

“ You would not wish it, could you only know
What you would leave, how little gain,”

Replied the mother with a gasp of pain.

“A cramped-up house, hemmed in by hundreds
more
Which open almost at your very door ;
A street, blocked up by teams, and men and
boys—
Would be the most among your city joys ;
And you would lose the cliffs, the beach, the
sea ;
The sweet wild-bird songs, ringing glad and
free ;
The wilderness of flowers and perfumed air ;
And health, perhaps, would not go with you
there.”

“I could not give them up,” the boy replied,
“Not even, mamma, if I might decide
To suit myself. So I am satisfied.”

“Look yonder !” Edith said, as Allan ceased,
“A heavy cloud is rising in the east,
I fear that we will have a storm to-night.”

“But I love storms !” the lad replying said ;
And turned his gaze to where the crags o’erhead
Were gathering the clouds that floated there
And dropped their moisture down into the air ;
For even while he spoke, great rain-drops fell ;
The waves beneath rose with a higher swell ;
And hollow winds came sighing o’er the sea,
Each moment gaining more intensity.

Then died away the brassy sunset glare,
And intense darkness settled everywhere,
Rent by the vivid lightning, showing plain
Surrounding objects, drenched by beating rain.

O, what a night ! The tempest wildly roared ;
The thunder rattled, and the rain-drops poured
In torrents, that rushed madly down to meet
The waves that dashed so far beneath their feet.

Then came a sound that made both faces pale ;
For high above the wailing of the gale

Was heard the booming of a minute gun!

Instinctively the mother clasped her son,
And wildly cried :

“ A vessel in distress !

No help in all this rocky wilderness !

What shall we do, my child ? What shall we
do ? ”

But she was powerless, as well she knew.

Long hours the tempest raged ; long hours the
gun

Told of the direful work the storm had done,

At length, the booming ceased ; the tempest
stilled,

And Heaven's vault with starry lamps was filled,
Though yet the moaning waves dashed on the
shore—

God only knew what precious freight they bore !

A quick resolve by Edith Dare was made.

Upon his couch, her sleeping child she laid ;

Then she awoke her aged serving-man,

That he might help her carry out her plan

Of giving aid to such as should survive—

That the tempestous waves might landward
drive.

Her years beside the sea had not been lost.

In sun and storm, the inlet she had crossed ;

Had hunted each descent along the coast,

And could almost a sailor's knowledge boast.

The two together from the cottage went

And made a rather perilous descent,

Reaching a narrow wave-washed beach of sand,

That gave their little boat a place to land,

And kept it off the cruel rocks near by.

But nothing of the ship could they descry.

They could not see amid the gloom of night

A sign of life, or single ray of light.

Where was the ship that signaled its distress ?

Was none alive for them to save and bless ?

But, even while she thought, the dark waves
cast

Landward a something that went dashing past.

Some castaway, perhaps, that she might save.

She hesitated not, for she was brave.

Into the surf she sprang, grasped it, and found

A baby to a life-preserver bound.

The serving man, though old, was not afraid,
And he went quickly to his mistress's aid.

Some toil, some swimming, and both came to
land.

Upon the narrow beach of wave-washed sand,

Beneath the rocks, below the "Eagle's Nest;"

But Edith held the child close to her breast.

Limp and unconscious, drooped the baby head,
Though faintly beat the heart; it was not dead.

She turned the tiny creature on its face,
Beginning at that instant to retrace
Her weary way, up to her own abode;
Although, at times she staggered neath her load.
The baby, being fully two years old,
Was large and rather cumbersome to hold.

Her home was reached at last. At her desire,
The woman had already made a fire.

She, in its light, disrobed the icy form,
Rubbing it gently that it might grow warm.

She was rewarded; for a glowing heat
Spread over it from head to hands and feet.

Two blue eyes slowly opened by and by;
Two pale lips parted with a gasping sigh;
And Edith knew the baby would not die.

The dismal darkness of the night was gone
And from the sea appeared a ruddy dawn.

It might be that the daylight would disclose
Some vestige of the ship, and trace of those

Who vainly called throughout the night for aid.

Alas! her gentle heart was sore afraid
That their last earthly voyage had been made.

She left her charge and once more sallied out,
All filled with doubting hope and hoping doubt.

Across the water's waste, her glance she threw,
And it, returning, sought a nearer view.

Close to a rocky cliff she saw a wreck;
But all was silent; not a soul on deck.
Yet she discerned, when once again she tried,
A something clinging to the vessel's side.

No time to lose! Into her boat she sprung.
'Twas well that she was nimble, strong and
young,
And there at home; else she were swamped
among

The breakers of that still tempestuous sea.

But not a single thought of self had she.

A nearer view disclosed a woman there,
With shivering form and floating dark-brown
hair.

Then Edith urged her boat still faster on.

Their glances met. It was Miss Treverton.

CHAPTER II.

FOR pity's sake, to stranger's aid we go
With willing hands and with a cheerful heart ;
When sympathy is needed for a foe,
'Tis sometimes hard to do the better part ;
And, for a moment, Edith Dare relaxed
The efforts which had been so sorely taxed.

“ O, God ! ” cried her rebellious heart, “ why ?
why ?

Should it be mine to let her live or die ? ”

An instant only, did she hesitate.

She was above a petty act of hate ;
(Ah, such an act had left her desolate.)
And once again her strokes were firm and bold.

Lucinda started—almost lost her hold,
When Edith's face and figure came in view.
How well that form, that golden hair she knew !
She almost thought that she could see her sneer,
As with quick strokes the little boat came near.

But o'er the waters rang a cheery tone,
In answer to her heart's despairing moan !

“ Hold fast, Lucinda ! Keep your hope
And strength for just a few short moments
more !

Now ; gently loose one hand and catch the
rope !—

There !—You are safe and soon will reach the
shore.”

No moment of her short, eventful life
Brought such a joy to that deserted wife,
As when she saw Lucinda in the boat,

And wrapped the shivering creature in her coat.
And never such humiliation came
As then Lucinda felt. Her face, in shame,
She hid behind her hands. Her first wild
thought

Had been to die, as then she felt she ought,
Rather than to accept her life from one
Whose happiness by her had been undone.
But life was sweet—sooner than give it up,
She drank humiliation's bitter cup.

"Are any more alive upon the vessel there?"
In eager, kindly tones, asked Edith Dare.

Lucinda looked up, blankly answering:

"None!

All gone!—the captain, crew and every one!"

"But Ronald—Mr. Dean, was he lost too?"
And such a gasping sigh as Edith drew!
She had not breathed her husband's name for
years,

And it was wrung for her by direst fears.

"Gone!" was the answer with the same blank
stare.

"All gone!" She ran her fingers through her
hair,

As though she had forgotten when or where.

"There was a child on board; but it is safe,"
Said Edith, thinking of the little waif.

"Is it your child?"

Lucinda shook her head.

"Gone! All are gone!" in thrilling tones,
she said.

"The dark mad waters took them all, but me!
I hear them laughing way down in the sea!
Look! they are jealous that I have relief!"

"Poor thing!" sighed Edith. "She is crazed
with grief."

The little boat went bravely to the shore,

And soon deposited the freight it bore.

But poor Lucinda's strength had given way,
As had her mind. Her feet would not obey
Her will to climb up to the Eagle's Nest.
And so to carry her, it was thought best;
But this required both the servants' aid,
And, even then, small progress could be made,
For it was not an easy task to do.
The path was steep and very narrow, too,
And oft necessitated them to rest.

What tried her kind preserver all the more
Was that she ceased to sense she was on shore,
But clasped her arms about the other's neck,
Imagining herself upon the wreck,
Begging and praying that she might not die,
And wildly uttering cry after cry.

Before they reached the Eagle's Nest retreat,
Her blood was burning with a fever heat;
And when she was undressed and put to bed,
'Twas with wide-open eyes and cheeks deep red.
Still realizing nothing done or said.
Her thoughts were far away. Her busy brain
Was conjuring views of things long past—
From childhood's hours up to the fatal blast,
Moaning the while in agony of pain.

No longer undisturbed was Edith Dare.
A doctor's presence was required there,
And nurse's, too,—the patient must have care.

The rescued child—it was a girl—could walk,
And in her baby way began to talk
As soon as she was fairly on her feet—
A lovely infant, fair, and pure, and sweet.
Whose child was she? Edith was fain to know,
Perhaps the little creature's clothes would show.
And sure enough a mark was to be seen:
"Ruby"—that was the only name they bore;
But on a white silk handkerchief, she wore

About her neck, was written, "Ronald Dean."
His child!—and hers, who was so very ill,
While he, in ocean depths, was cold and still!
The ones that he had loved, to her were sent
To be, perhaps, a life-long punishment;
For they were friendless—cast upon her care,
And pity urged that she should keep them there.
Alas! O God! the cross was hard to bear!

Again rebellious grew her heart, and she
Turned from the child half angrily.
Had he been true, a babe like that might be
Her own. A sweet young daughter—only one
She wished, for a companion to her son.

And now the much-desired companion came—
His sister, claimant to his father's name;
Yet not her own—instead, a child of shame.
Yes, shame! Not even wedlock could remove
the blame
And blot which by the parents had been wrought.
"Besides he has not righted her!" she
thought.

"Her fevered ravings so far fail to show
Aught but the deepest of remorse and woe."

"Brain-fever," so the all-wise doctor said,
And ominously shook his aged head
Above Lucinda, raving in her bed.

She lived her love-life over—all the hours
When she and Ronald plucked the summer
flow'rs

And hunted berries in the meadow grass!
Hours filled with happiness, all gone, alas!
Her love for him, her jealousy, despair;
The hopeless struggle that she made to bear
Her cross; her error and repentance, too,
Passed like a vivid panoramic view
Before her eyes; and Edith heard and wept
While she, beside the bed, a vigil kept.

She locked her secret in her breast. None
knew

Whence poor Lucinda came, or even who
She was. The bit of wreck did not disclose
The vessel's name, and nothing told of those
Who had set sail upon it. Not a trace
Of that doomed vessel's starting-place
Had even she. Nor had she heard or seen
Aught, since the day he left, of Ronald Dean ;
And little did Lucinda's ravings tell.
But all were known, perhaps, when she were
well ;
If she should die, 'twere better none should
know

Of her identity, or sin, or woe.

The crisis came. Lucinda did not die.
The angel Death once more had passed her by.
Her life was saved, but memory was gone,
And to her came no ray of reason's dawn.
Like as a child, obedient and kind
She was, and reasoned with an infant's mind.
She had forgot her friends and her own name,
Her parentage, and how and whence she came.
She wandered with the children, and each day
She spent in baby prattle and in play,
Learning, and saying what they had to say.
Whene'er she mentioned gentle Edith Dare,
She said " the angel with the golden hair "
And called her nothing else. It was not strange,
That Edith Dare's resentment knew a change,
Melting away to patient tenderness.
Nor to the baby did she offer less.
For Ruby was a darling little child,
Happy and laughing, never rough or wild,
Who clung so lovingly to Edith Dare,
That her sweet life was not without a share
Of Allan's mother's love and watchful care.

To send her charges to the Brighton farm,
Was sometimes Edith's thought; but then the
harm,

That they would take to that sweet lady there,
Caused her to pause, and pausing, to forbear.

"Poor Ronald loved them," to herself she
said,

Thinking with tear-filled eyes, and low-bowed
head,

"And if he can, in spirit-life, but see
What I have done, perhaps, he smiles on me!"

CHAPTER III.

No further need had Edith Dare to hide
Herself from the great world that moved outside
The precincts of her own sweet dwelling-place.
Indeed of her, her friends had lost all trace;
And though she kept her maiden name of Dare,
The children, unrestrained, went here and there,
Flitting about like wild-birds, glad and free.
They climbed the cliffs; they sailed upon the sea;
And when they older grew, they wandered down
The rocky road, and took their way to town,
On pleasant Sabbaths and on market days,
Where something new was sure to meet their
gaze.

In fact, they roamed the country, far and near.
And what delightful, happy days those were!
No rock, or tree, or path but what they knew;
They watched the many flowers while they grew;
They saw the birds hatched in each cosy nest,
And named the ones the mothers loved the best;
They picked up shells, and they explored the
caves;

They, laughing, ran to meet the crested waves
Which broke upon the narrow beach of sand;
And sailed almost beyond the sight of land;
On Sundays, sought a village church to kneel
And listen to the organ's solemn peal,
The prayer and reading of the sacred Word,
That in each breast, its noblest impulse stirred.
They liked so much to see the village fairs,
And view the merchants' many kind of wares.

Nor least among their pleasures were their lesson
hours,

Or mornings, when they worked among the
flow'rs

That beautified the garden of their home ;
For though kind Edith gave them time to roam
All undisturbed, she set them tasks to do
As well ; nor let them leave until she knew
Those tasks were done. Then, when the sable
pall

Of night had been upon the earth let fall,
All gathered in the cosy sitting-room,
Whose light and melody dispersed the gloom,
They singing, while the sweet guitar was played
By either Edith or the little maid ;
Or else some book of interest was read.

But always, ere the children went to bed,
They knelt them down at Edith's knees and
prayed ;

And often poor Lucinda also came,
With low-bowed head, and did the same.

So passed away the happy years between
That long-remembered and eventful day.
When Edith saved the baby castaway,
And the bright girlhood hours of Ruby Dean.

As happy as a lark, sweet as a rose,
With ever thoughtful tenderness and care,
She lived—a sunbeam in the home of those
Who rescued her from death and brought her
there.

Her birth had been forgiven by Edith Dare.
She did not dream she was Lucinda's child,
For poor Lucinda always shook her head and
smiled

In such an absent way, if reference
To little Ruby as her child was made ;
And never once would own the baby, hence

No stress upon her motherhood was laid,
So Ruby knew that, from the sea she came.
And that her baby clothes disclosed her name;
But nothing more. For Edith never told
The wrong she had endured in days of old.

Their little world outside, still looked upon
The harmless lunatic as being one
Crazed by that frightful night upon the sea,
Lost to her friends, her very name unknown.
Therefore the gossips let her quite alone.
In fact, so far removed from them was she,
So hard of access, was her dwelling-place,
Few knew her, although meeting face to face.

Nor all unhappy was the life of Edith Dare,
Amid her round of watchfulness and care.
For oh! the light of happiness can bless
Naught but a life of pure unselfishness!
And where she thought to find a pain, came
peace;

And in her noble acts obtained release
From the remorse that followed on her sin.
Before she knew it, she found comfort in
The tasks that she had set herself to do;
And life for her took on a brighter hue.

Sometimes vexations came, and then she said:
"He loved them; and since he is with the dead,
I loved him not, if I would let them live
Without the tender care that he would give."

But though the child grew up with health and
strength,

A human rosebud bursting into bloom,
Lucinda faded daily, till at length
She seemed to lack the will to leave her room.
She oftentimes refused to quit her bed,
Complaining of a dizziness of head,
Yet seldom spoke of feeling any pain.

So finding that all efforts were in vain

To woo her out into the sun and air,
Edith bestowed on her a larger share
Of time and thought, and tender, patient care.

Meanwhile, with every journey of the sun,
Her Allan grew ; and he was twenty-one,
Upon a hazy, sweet September morn,
Not much unlike the day when he was born.

That morn, she with a loving pressure drew
Him to her breast, and bright her blue eyes grew.

" You were indeed a precious gift to me,
My consolation, and my joy and pride."
In accents fond and tender, whispered she.

He laughing said :

" I have not left your side,
Sweet mamma mine, as boys are apt to do ;
And so a birthday gift, I ask of you."

And she replied :

" Ask what you will, my son ;
It shall be yours, can it be had or done."

" Ah ! that is easy said, for you have seen
Since I have been for years her worshipper,
That the one gift I crave is Ruby Dean."

She staggered backward with a paling face,
From which that instant fled joy's faintest trace,
And answered sharply :

" Anything but her !
Blind fool ! I did not dream that, more than
brother

And sister, you and Ruby loved each other ;
Else I had put the ocean 'twixt you two !"

" My mother," and the young man proudly
drew

Himself erect. " That does not sound like you.
Your life has ever been so pure and true,
I did not think that you would cast a blame
On her, because a waif to us she came."
Indeed, I doubt not if the truth were known,

She holds a rank quite equal to our own."

"Alas!" said Edith, "that my son should think

His mother's soul into such depths could sink!

Deeper, far deeper is the gulf between

My son and poor ill-fated Ruby Dean.

"O, Allan, have I not been always kind?

And in my fond devotion blind

To all your faults? Has not your happiness

Been my first thought throughout my life?

My love for Ruby, too, is scarcely less.

Would I refuse to let you make her wife,

Think you, for such a trivial cause?

I grieve that such a marriage cannot be.

Her parentage is not unknown to me,—

You may not wed her—'tis against our laws.

"Ask me no more. Believe me when I say

The gulf that parts you must remain for aye.

No one can bridge it. Then seek not to share

The wretched secret that I have to bear!"

"Dear mother, words like those would drive
me mad!

If any weighty sorrow you have had,

Or, as your words lead me to fear, a shame,

It is my place to share and have the same."

A thought of Ronald's letter to her came.

It was his wish, the boy sometime should know

The father's love and shame, the mother's woe.

The time had come. She turned with faltering
feet,

Toward her desk, and took the faded sheet—

The cruel letter of the long ago

Therefrom; then slowly reached it to her son.

"Your father wrote it; 'twas the only one

He ever sent to me, and he is dead,

But it will tell you all," she simply said.

Then silence fell while he in wonder read.

His features, ere the task was finished, wore
A look of sad perplexity and doubt.

"Explain," he said. "I do not make it out.
The mystery is greater than before.

You say he is my father—that would mean
That mine instead of Ruby's name is Dean."

"The handkerchief that Ruby wore, you know,
Had RONALD DEAN marked on it."

"That is so,"

Said Allan, and his tones were sad and low.

"The woman sick in yonder room, is she
Who took your father, dear, from you and me."

"And you have kept and waited on her, here
In loving tenderness, this many a year?"

Exclaimed the youth. "What sort of woman
Are you? The act is more than human."

"He was her lover first, my darling son.
They quarrelled. I, his name and fortune, won.
I loved him madly—loving, stooped to sin,
And took from her what was not mine to win.
It is a long, sad story. Of his heart,
He never gave to me the smallest part.
At last, by chance, he met her, and they fled—
He told it by the letter you have read.

"I had my baby. I resolved to share
His love with none. I took the name of Dare—
My own, my father's—a most honored name;
Bought the dear 'Eagle's Nest,' and here we
came.

"That fatal storm you must remember well.
All perished—so I heard Lucinda tell.
I could have let her die. God knows the thought
Came to my mind. But better ones were brought
By the next moment. I had saved their child—
I saved the mother, too; and Heaven smiled
Upon my deed of mercy. But, Ruby, dear,
The secret of her birth must never hear.

She is your little sister—treat her so.”

But Allan’s sunny head was drooping low,
And he was cringing ’neath the heavy blow—
The very first that had been his to feel.

His mother saw the tear-drop slowly steal
From his closed eyes; and felt that yet
Her sin pursued her. Ah! vain was regret!
Vain all her acts atoning for that sin!
The angel Peace was not for her to win.

“One thing alone remains for me to do,”
He said anon in broken tones. “From you
And Ruby I must go, until a time
When I can calmly look on father’s crime—
Till I shall love poor Ruby less than now.”

“Alas!” cried Edith, “How, oh! how
Am I to live with my one treasure gone?
Far sooner I will send Miss Treverton
And her child, Ruby, too, out of our home,
Than that my son should be obliged to roam
Afar from me! Or, if that is not best
Then they may take as theirs the ‘Eagle’s Nest!’
From you, I cannot, will not live apart.
The very thought brings anguish to my heart!
My first great duty is to guard my son;
And, God forgive me, if I have not done
What I should do for those two castaways!”

“Your acts,” he said, “elicit naught but praise,
And in my heart I cannot ask for more
Self-sacrifice. No martyr ever wore
A crown of sharper thorns. Yet I implore
That you will not leave Ruby all alone.
She is so young, and she has nothing known
Of any world outside the one we own
Our ‘Eagle’s Nest.’”

“I have a thought in mind,”
The mother answered, and her tone was kind.
“I might send Ruby off to boarding-school.

Rich people make a custom and a rule
Of finishing a daughter's learning so.
The prospect would delight the child, I know ;
And thus she might be spared a bitter blow ;
For time and absence would work out the rest."

"The very thing," cried Allan, and he pressed
His faithful mother closely to his breast.

"Meanwhile, unless Lucinda should grow
worse,"

Continued Edith, "I will hire a nurse,
To care for her; and you and I, my son,
Will go abroad, and thus, perhaps, your peace be
won.

For time and travel, ages since, have wrought
A change in human love and human thought."

The land beyond! It matters not how fair
Our dwelling place, we deem that over there
A fairer one is waiting for our feet.
So Ruby Dean, although her life was sweet,
Heard of the prospect of a year of change
With eager joy that Allan thought was strange
In one so fond of home as she had seemed.

Alas! poor Ruby Dean! She never dreamed
That she was sent that they might be apart;
Else she had gone away with broken heart.

Instead, she dropped a single happy tear
At parting; saying:

"Only for a year!
I shall return so wise and so improved,
That I shall be, still more than now, beloved."

Happy and hopeful was the maiden's tone;
But Allan answered with a smothered moan.

CHAPTER IV.

LUCINDA weaker grew with every hour.
She faded slowly, even as a flower
That hangs long on the stem, and fades and dies
One petal at a time. Her matchless eyes
Remained undimmed; but shorter grew her
breath,

And her wan face took on the hue of death.

She had seen Ruby leave without demur;
For dearer far to Edith than to her
The rescued castaway had ever been.

"Perhaps," thought Edith, "she does not
forget,

Entirely, her misery and sin;
And sight of Ruby causes her regret.
I know if her sad error had been mine
That I should wish to die 'and make no sign.'"

They saw Lucinda fading day by day,
And it necessitated a delay
Of Edith's journey with her darling son.

Knowing Lucinda's race was almost run,
Too kind was Edith's heart for her to leave,
The crazed and dying woman to receive
The care of those who recked not of her woe,
And that her life was ebbing, sure though slow.

So Edith said:

"'Twill not be long, my son;
And, knowing that our duty has been done,
E'en though we made that duty, we will go
With far more cheerful hearts, than we would
know

If we should leave her here to die alone."

“My darling mother—mine, my very own!”
Exclaimed the youth, “Since Ruby is away,
Not in the least I murmur at delay.
Were I to suit myself, here I would stay,
To rove the paths that she and I have roved
And tend the flowers she and I have loved.
But since our love must perish—’tis but right
That those reminders were put out of sight;
And your high sense of duty makes me strong
To do my duty and to flee the wrong.”

“I feel for her, who early lost her way,
And from the ‘Fold’ has been so long astray.
I would not leave her as she is to-day.
But I am not as good and true as you.
I ne’er had thought the task was mine to do.
I, loving Ruby, only tolerate
One whom I otherwise would scorn and hate.
Yet you, my mother, had the strength to save,
And care for her down to the very grave,
Urged on by nothing but your own pure heart
And your desire to do a Christian’s part.”

“You credit me too much;” and Edith smiled.
“It was because I loved your father, child.
Perhaps I should have cared for them the same
Had I not known her history and name,
For I am tender-hearted to distress;
But, knowing, had I loved your father less,
I doubt if I had had the strength to do
That which for doing, you have called me true
And noble-hearted; yet, my dear, in you,
Who love poor Ruby, it is plain to see,
Is the same impulse that inspired me.”

That eve, the sun went down with brassy glare
That threw a burnished gilding everywhere;

And Edith said again, as once before,
Her glances wandering from sea to shore,
Her face all ruddy in the sunset light :

“ The signs foretell a frightful storm to-night.
Remember you, how fourteen years ago,
We watched an autumn tempest rising so ?
We have seen many since that time, but then
I felt a sad foreboding, that again
I feel. My son, I somehow have the fear
That death may even now be waiting near.”

“ O, you are only nervous, mamma, dear.
An equinoctial gale comes every year,
Yet 'tis not often ships are driven here.”

His voice was hushed, for, even then, the gale
Came, heralded by naught except a wail
Of moaning winds among the crags o'erhead ;
And Edith Dare, filled with a direful dread,
Closed up the house and sought Lucinda's bed,
Knowing full well that such a frightful storm
Would bring a terror to the shrinking form
And weakened mind. All storms had such effect.
Awakened memories of that which wrecked
Herself and those she loved were sometimes
shown

Amid the thunder's rattle and the moan
Of tempest winds, and vivid lightning gleams ;
Though they were ever fleeting as are dreams.
Sometimes, a few brief sentences, she spoke,
Of sense. But all connection quickly broke,
And she was wandering once more in night,
Still darker for the transient ray of light.

That time, Lucinda clung to Edith's neck,
Imagining that she was on the wreck,
Amid the storm of fourteen years before ;
And, while she trembled at the thunder's roar,
Within her eyes a gleam of reason shone.

At first she seemed, for quite a while, to be

Again upon that fated ship and sea,
Talking to some one in a cheerful tone ;
 " Do not be frightened, dearest Mrs. May.
The storm, though fearful, soon will pass away.
Besides I just now heard the captain say
The ship is staunch and we need have no fear.

* * There, try to rest. I'll tend the baby,
 dear.

I'll tie a handkerchief about her neck
And we will take a little peep on deck,
The good old captain will not tell us nay !

* * A moment only we will be away.

* * O God ! what a terrific crash—that
 last !

I know it was the breaking of a mast * * *
The worst has come—the very worst, I know.

* * I cannot, will not, captain, stay below !
O, death is here ! His icy touch I feel,
And we are lost ! O God ! yes, every one ! "

She shrieked aloud. The booming of a gun
Had caused her dream of anguish to be real.

It also told a ship was in distress.

Young Allan Dare, whose courage was not
 less

Than Edith's once had been, sprang up in haste.

" Come Gerald, quick ! we have no time to
 waste.

We know the coast so well that we can steer
And bring that vessel to a harbor here
Within the inlet's mouth, unless a leak
She is ; in which case we must seek
To save her precious freight of human lives,
To send back to their mothers and their wives."

The two old people long had been replaced
By servants stronger-limbed and younger-faced ;
And Gerald's boat could float upon the sea,
It mattered not how rough the waves might be.

Again the gun was heard. With paling face,
The mother clasped her son in fond embrace.

"If you are lost, God help me!" murmured
she.

"I am your son!" quite proudly answered
he.

"Two men like us, who both are young and
strong,

Should row a boat your hands could send along.
Good-bye, my mother. Keep up heart, and pray
Our Father's love to guide us while away."

One kiss, and he was gone—her darling son!

Ah! there it was again—the minute gun!

"My God! will no one come to give us aid!"
Lucinda screamed. "Is every one afraid
Of those dark bitter waters! * * O, how
cold!

* * Alas! dear Ronald never will be told
How his Lucinda died! * * * Poor Mrs
May!

Drowned in her berth, where weak and ill she
lay!

* * I can not save the child, but it shall
take

My last and only chance, for her dear sake!

* * * Go, little one! you can at worst but
die.

Soon we shall meet again—you, dear, and I.

* * * The boats, the men, have disappeared
from view!

My! how the wreck careens! * * I must
go, too!

Cold * * cold as death, those waves! And
all are gone!

* * Great God, be thanked, for yonder is
the dawn!

* * * * *

“If I can cling yet longer, help may come.
But, oh! my fingers are so tired and numb,
* * * Ah! yonder comes a boat! a woman,
too!

How beautiful she is! How good and true
She must be, thus to brave the stormy sea—
Nobly to risk her life in saving me!
It must be me, she sees! Yes, I am seen!
Saved! saved! * * God pity me, by Edith
Dean!”

The name was uttered with a piercing shriek,
As backward drooped her head. She then, so
weak

And so exhausted, on her pillow lay
That life, for her, seemed ebbing fast away.

Fearing she might annoy the sufferer,
Edith withdrew quite quietly from her,
And stood obscured from view amid the gloom
That reigned in one dark corner of the room.

Some moments passed, for her, in silent dread,
And then Lucinda rationally said:

“Yes, I remember now. ’Tis like a dream!
But near me, ever since, has been the gleam
Of golden hair! A voice, sweet and low,
Has sought to cheer me! It is hers, I know.
She is an angel, and I wronged her so!

“The child—the dear, sweet girl they sent
away

To boarding school, is little Ruby May!
The youth is son to gentle Edith Dean!
But where is Ronald!—him I have not seen
And Ruby May is grown! Then many a year
Have we been kept by her, and cared for here!

“Sweet Edith! Heavenly Father, hear my
cry—

Help me to right her wrong before I die!”

Again she was exhausted.

Edith came
With soft steps to her side, and breathed her
name.

"Lucinda, my poor friend," she gently said,
"Him, we both madly loved, and he is dead.
You wronged me, true; but then I wronged you
first,

And both of us, dear soul, have been sin-cursed.
Sisters in sin and woe we two have been,
I trust we have atoned for all our sin.
Sisters in love, henceforward, let us be!"

"Alas!" Lucinda made reply, "for me
It is too late. Before another day
I shall have passed from earth away.
But you may tell our little Ruby May,
That though her mother to her death has gone
Her father may be found in Wilmington,
If he is living still. His name is John—
John May. His wife was ill and weak, and she
Was sent to take a voyage on the sea.
I was her friend and bore her company."

"Great God be thanked that she is not your
own,"
Cried Edith, "and need not your sin atone!
But all these years, poor child, I thought her so.
"My son grew fond of her. He did not
know

Until quite recently, his father's name,
Or that the girl's was thought to be the same.
But when he did, he saw that they must part.

"She went away from us with cheerful heart,
Because she had been spared the bitter blow,
That drooped my Allan's sunny head so low.

"Great God be praised, they may be happy
now,
And he may honestly redeem his vow!"

Her sweet, pure face was thankfully uplifted;

And even while she spoke the storm-cloud rifted,
Disclosing there the moon, whose rays were
shed

In loving benediction on her head.

A moment passed, and then Lucinda said :
"You spoke of Ronald Dean as being dead—
Do you know how, and when, and where he
died?"

"That you should answer," Edith Dare re-
plied ;

"Except a letter written on that day,
I have heard nothing since he went away.
But I supposed he perished in that storm."

A thrill of joy ran through Lucinda's form.

"Ah! then perhaps he lives!" she faintly
cried.

"If so, my prayer to God is not denied!
For you the right to happiness have won.
I left him at the Mays, in Wilmington,
Where I expected soon to be again;
And he was handsome, strong and healthful
then."

The golden head drooped low, and Edith
pressed,

Convulsively, her right hand to her breast.

It would be difficult to analyze

Her thoughts. When those we loved are dead,
we prize

The good that they possessed. The evil dies

Out of our memories. He long had been

A saint to Edith, who forgot his sin,

And everything except she loved him. Now,

The falling robes revealed a broken vow.

Before her was his victim, whose sad life

Was well-nigh spent; more wretched than the
wife

Who had, unloved, forsaken home and name

To hide herself and child from his dark shame.

"Lucinda," Edith's tone was sharp and quick;
For one brief moment she forgot how sick
The other was; "plan not for me, I pray.
I died—yes, died when Ronald went away!
We may clasp hands upon the other shore;
But in this life, Lucinda, never more!
Forgive me, dear one, I would pain you not.
Yours, after all, has been the harder lot;
For you were sweet and loving, kind and true—
It was my sin, O God! that ruined you!"

"Lucinda, care nor comfort shall you lack;
Get well, poor girl, and let me send you back
To him who loves you. Years, he has been free;
And you will not be taking him from me.
To see your wrong once righted—you his wife—
I would most willingly lay down my life!"

Lucinda answered:

"Nay, my angel friend,
I cannot go. I am so nigh my end
That you could count the minutes and not tire.
Therefore, to right your wrong is my desire.
Indeed, though grievous Ronald's fault has been,
Not his alone was that life-wrecking sin.
Remember it, if e'er you chance to meet."

"My dear," and Edith's tone was kind and
sweet,

"'Tis long since either saw him. It may be
That he has quite forgotten you and me.
Perhaps has wooed another. 'Twere not strange
To happen in this fickle world of change.
But in our bosom still the wounds are sore .
So let us talk and think of him no more.

"See! now the storm is over! up on high,
The placid moon is riding in the sky!
No longer do we hear the minute-gun.
The hour is late—yes, it is nearly one.

My child—my only one, may even now
Be food for fishes! So I pray allow
Me just a few short minutes. I will run
Down to the boat and learn what has been done;
I will awake the housemaid. She shall stay
With you; and I will not be long away."

Then Edith pressed Lucinda's finger-tips,
And to the icy forehead touched her lips.

A moment later she was gone from sight,
Out in the wet and shadows of the night.

CHAPTER V.

THREE men came toiling up the cliffs, and two
Of them the anxious woman full well knew.
Foremost, and eagerest, was Allan Dare,
Who soon espied his mother standing there,
Upon a rock that overlooked the sea.

It needed but a few quick bounds to be
Beside her, holding her close to his breast,
“Our labor, mother, has been richly blessed,”
He said. “The ship had lost her reckoning,
And it was only needed we should bring
Her to a harbor in our inlet here.
She passed the ugly rocks, quite safe and clear;
None lost, and very little damage done.
She now awaits the rising of the sun,
To ascertain how much, and, if she may,
Put out to sea again, without delay.”

“Thank God that all are safe!” the mother
cried.
My life were wrecked, indeed, if you had died!
“But whom have you brought hither?” she
inquired.

“A passenger, my mamma, who desired
To see his home, who came to the relief
Of that poor ship already brought to grief.
His name I know not, but 'tis easy seen
He is a gentleman; and wealthy, too, I ween.
Nor seems he like a stranger—”

But just then
The rock was reached by those two other men.
There was a startled cry; for once again

Edith stood face to face with Ronald Dean.

Yet from her eyes flashed forth a look of joy.

"Thank God!" she cried, "you've saved your father, boy!"

But Allan Dare drew back with haughty mien,

And arms close-folded to his throbbing breast.

"This, then," he said, in measured tones,
"is he

Who years ago deserted you and me

For that mad woman at the Eagle's Nest;

And I have saved his false and worthless life!"

His teeth were set with bitter inward strife.

But Ronald Dean spoke not. He looked
about

In dumb surprise, and seemed the facts to doubt,
Unheeding Allan's most unfilial sneer.

Then Edith spoke:

"He is your father, dear;

And He who ruleth, best can judge between

The son of Edith Dare and Ronald Dean.

Besides, my boy, as your invited guest,

He must be welcomed at our 'Eagle's Nest.'"

And then to Ronald, in low tones, she said:

"She that you loved—Lucinda—is not dead.

I saved her from a wreck, and she is here.

So dreadful was her fright, she went insane;

And till to-night, we questioned her in vain

Concerning those who loved and cared for her.

That you were dead—she led me to infer,"

"My child! Lucinda! Edith!—all so near!"

Gasped the bewildered man. "Am I alive?"

"O, yes, dear father, you still live and thrive,"

Young Allan said. "You may be somewhat
loth

To own us, since myself and Ruby, both

Are here; but mother shielded her from blame,

By giving her, not me, your honored name."
Here Edith quickly interrupted.

"Nay,

Lucinda told me since you went away
To-night, our darling's name is Ruby May.
She bears no kinship to a Dean or Dare,
And in the sin of either has no share."

'Tis often said that joy doth never kill;
But down dropped Allan, breathless, white and
still.

The woeful sorrow lifted, he grew weak,
And for a moment could not stand or speak—

A moment only. Then he was himself once
more.

And what a joyous light his features wore
As to his feet he sprung.

"Then I forgive,"

He cried, "and thank God, father, that you
live!"

"Alas!" said Ronald, "that it is my lot
Always to seem to be what I am not!
Lucinda, whom I lost so long ago,
Was always pure as is the falling snow.
For though she fled from home and friends with
me,

I claimed her not till law had set me free
To offer her an honest love and life.
As sister did I guard her, till as wife
She came into my arms. No love like mine
E'er casts a worshipped idol from its shrine
To be down-trodden in pollution's mire.
Pure love can always crush unchaste desire.
I loved Lucinda—that protected her."

Then Edith said, her gentle soul astir
With thankfulness and joy:

"I, too, forgive

And praise the One who ruleth that you live!—

Praise God that I have saved and sheltered
here,

Through joy and sorrow for this many a year,
A woman who inspired so pure a love!

"See! yonder is the 'Eagle's Nest,' above
You crag! Lucinda, crazed since that sad night
That wrecked her, lives once more in reason's
light.

But she is ill, and we must not delay,
Already I have been too long away."

She started ere the words had quit her tongue;
And nimbly up, from rock to rock, she sprung,
Leaving her son as escort to the guest.

At last, sweet peace was reigning in her
breast.

Her sin had been atoned, the wrong repaired.
Henceforth, from all remorse, she would be
spared.

The house was reached, and down beside the
bed
She kneeled; and joyful were the words she
said:

Live, dear Lucinda Dean! The ship is clear
Of rocks; and it is anchored safely near;
And Ronald—your dear Ronald Dean is here!"

"My prayer is heard!" the other whispered
low

"I begged our Father that it might be so!"

CHAPTER VI.

"LUCINDA, dear, it cannot, must not be !
To lose you, now you have returned to me
Is cruel ! All the bitter agony
Of separation to be lived again !
And this is worse than was the other. Then
Hope staid to comfort me, and left me not
Till I became accustomed to my lot.

"That you are very weak and ill, I know,
But I will not believe you are so low
That love can fail to woo you back to life,
And to my arms, my own, my precious wife !"

'Twas Ronald Dean who spoke, as with bowed
head,
He kneeled in anguish by Lucinda's bed.

"See, Ronald," she replied, "the night is gone,
And in the east appears the golden dawn !
But when the sun-rays gleam upon the sea,
My poor sin-fettered spirit will be free.
My time is short, so listen, love, to me.

"It was not right to go as we two went ;
And Heaven sent a bitter punishment—
Yes, parted us as if we two were dead,
And not a ray on either's pathway shed !

"Ah ! but for Edith, I long since had died,
And you had never more knelt by my side.
She is a pure, white angel ! O, the pain
Of death is naught unless it be in vain
To right her ! When your wound is healed,
return

To her, who never yet has ceased to yearn

For you ;—whose soul for me with pity moved,
Because I was by you, dear one, beloved.

“The light increases ! Soon I go away
From earthly darkness to Eternal day !
I would see Edith just one moment more.”

Then Ronald, sobbing, rose, and at the door
Called for the woman with the golden hair.

White-robed she came, her face as sweet and
fair

As any saint's, and kneeled in silent prayer,
Resting her head near his upon the bed.

In a low, whispered tone, Lucinda said :

“I want to feel your hand, and Ronald's, too,
The way is dark ! O, help to lead me through
To where the light is gleaming on yon shore,
Where I shall be at peace forevermore !”

She raised herself. The reaching hands she
drew

Close to her icy lips ; then clasped the pair
Together ; for a moment held them there ;
She next essayed to speak, but made no sound.

Both saw that she was dying. With a bound,
Ronald sprang up and caught her sinking form.

Just then, across the ocean gleamed the sun,
As bright as though the world had known no
storm.

Lucinda's day Eternal had begun.

* * * * *

Upon the earth another morning shone,
And Ronald Dean was leaving—not alone,
The “Eagle's Nest.” A casket hid from view
His darling, whose remains were going, too.

His heart was heavy and his eyes were dim
With weeping ; yet his soul was strangely
moved

With tenderness whene'er he looked at her,
Who years had been a patient sufferer,

Atoning for the sin of loving him—
For now he knew her worthy to be loved.

They stood a moment, bending o'er the dead,
Before they parted. Ronald, weeping, said:

"Lucinda was her father's pet and pride,
And I shall see she rests close by his side.
The world must know that pure she lived and
died.

On such a mission do I go away.

"There are some things that I forgot to say,
Amid the joy and woe of yesterday.

"Poor Ruby's father died three years ago.
She has no living relative, I know,
Except a cousin who inherited
Her father's fortune in her stead.
The only one to prove her rights is dead."

"It matters not, since Ruby is to wed
Our Allan," Edith said, "some time next year.
But he and I, meanwhile, will go from here.
A trip across the sea will show our boy
Whether his love is pure or an alloy."

"And to his wedding may his father come?"
Asked Ronald Dean, and looked at her, a numb
Cold desolation tugging at his breast.

She answered softly,

"At the 'Eagle's Nest'
My Allan's father is a welcome guest,
Whene'er he deigns a visit to his son.
Farewell!"

She turned away. She could not brook
To give her love a single backward look.
Although a full atonement had been done
For all her sin, and consolation won,
She could not quite suppress at will
The yearning soul that made a struggle still—
That o'er the yawning gulf which lay between,
Reached out its longing arms to Ronald Dean.

CHAPTER VII.

A RUDDY sun was glowing in the west.
An autumn haze hung o'er the "Eagle's Nest."
The trees were in their matchless robes of gold
And crimson, for the weather had been cold.
A biting frost, with flurried flakes of snow,
And keen north-wind had laid the flowers low.

But summer had returned for one brief day,
With fair, sunshiny face and breath like May,
To say "good-bye," before she went away
On her long journey south, whose winter gloom
Would soon be dissipated by her bloom.

The house was open to the sun and air;
And, flitting in and out, a maiden, fair,
Blue-eyed and beautiful, was working there,
With nimble fingers, helping to prepare
A royal welcome for their coming home,
Who had spent months in old historic Rome,
And helped to make a small, brave-hearted band
That lately climbed the Alps of Switzerland.

The Dares had been a year, or more, abroad;—
Had reached again their own dear native sod,
And were expected home that very day,
Which was the reason that sweet Ruby May,
Knowing full well she had no time to waste,
Was flitting in and out in eager haste.
She brought the choicest hot-house plants, in
bloom,
To lend their fragrance to the drawing-room;
And, WELCOME HOME, she wrought in ever-
green

To greet sweet Edith and her Allan Dean—
 For she had learned such was her lover's name;
 And who she was, and from what place she
 came.

The entrance gate was what she wished to
 grace.

She tried to fix the motto in a place
 Above the arch; her ladder, bringing there.
 But, though she stood tip-toed, and stretched her
 fair,

Slim fingers to the utmost, still she lacked
 A full hand's breadth of having it exact.

A handsome man, whose face bore lines of
 care,

With silver gleaming in his nut-brown hair,
 Sat on a jutting rock, some ways beneath,
 And watched the maiden while she hung the
 wreath.

He heard her say:

“It is too low! O, dear!

I do so wish that Gerald could be here!

I am not tall enough.”

“Permit me, Miss,”

The stranger said; “I will assist in this.”

And then, without a second glance at her,
 He took and hung on high the wreath of fir.

To which she bowed a sweet:

“I thank you, sir!

Dear Mrs. Dare has been a year away.

She and her son are coming home to-day,”

She said in explanation. “I am Ruby May.”

What was his name, the man chose not to say.

“How fondly you must love her, thus to
 make

These pretty preparations for her sake!”

He said instead.

“I do!” the maiden cried.

Her happy face aflush with loving pride.

“Except for her, I when a babe had died.
She rescued from a most tempestuous sea,
Now fifteen years ago, not only me,
But a poor crazy woman, too. She cared
For both, and all her comforts with us shared.

“Brave as a lion, gentle as a dove,
Her life is one of pure, heroic love!
I never hear her voice, I do not feel
That at her feet it is my place to kneel,
As to the saints up at the altar’s shrine.”

“And that sweet angel once was mine—all
mine,”

He said with inward voice; yet spoke no word,
And Ruby even wondered if he heard.

In haste, and somewhat piqued, she turned
away.

His voice arrested her:

“Not to delay
Your preparations, Miss, I yet would ask
If I can give assistance in your task?”

“I have no task, my stranger friend,” said
she,

“Love’s pleasant labor ne’er a task can be.
But every one, who comes to ‘Eagle’s Nest,’
Receives a greeting as an honored guest—
’Twere worth a welcome, just to climb up here.
You are a stranger, too—”

“I am, my dear,
A wandering tourist.”

“What may I call
Your name?”

“Just Ronald—that is all.”

“How very strange!” She took a thoughtful
mien.

“When I was saved—a little castaway,
I wore a handkerchief, marked ‘Ronald Dean’;

And we all thought that was my father's name,
 Until the crazy woman, dying came
 Back to her mind and said his name was May."

"Ah! Edith's work of love was not alone
 For poor Lucinda; since she thought
 This was the child that sin to us had brought—
 My child!" gasped Ronald with a groan.

"Your pardon," Ruby said, "I did not hear."

"O, did I speak? Well, it was nothing,
 dear.

Command my services, I, too, will prove
 It is no task to aid in works of love."

They now had reached the vine-wreathed
 portico

That shut away the ruddy, sunset glow,
 And Ruby answered:

"Well, hang one wreath more,
 This one—SWEET HOME, above the outer door.
 * * Now, that is all! I trust they are not late.
 God bless them! There they are—down at the
 gate!"

Away she went, fast as her feet could run—
 Those pretty feet, so nimble, fleet and young,
 A glad, wild cry of welcome on her tongue!
 And, just a moment later, had been pressed
 With loving pressure to each loving breast
 Then walked between the mother and her son,
 Back to the cottage.

Ronald stood upon
 The porch where Ruby May had left him. She
 Had quite forgotten him in her wild joy,
 And she was startled when he said:

"My boy,
 Thank God, for your return to home and me!"

So great was the surprise that Edith seemed
 About to faint. She never once had dreamed
 Of meeting Ronald at the "Eagle's Nest."

He, forward springing, caught her to his breast,
And in a tone of deep emotion, cried :

“My pure, white angel, not far from your
side

Have strayed my feet, since it was yours to
roam.

O, let me help to give you welcome home—
Your own true home, my darling, in my heart.”

But she released and drew herself apart
From him, as in low tones, she firmly said :

“It is because she wished it, who is dead,
That you have come with loving words to me.
But what you ask can never, never be !
If by your love and faith I could be blest
Of all earth's happy ones, my lot were best !
But you care naught for me. . . You cannot give
The love for which it would be bliss to live !”

“Not love you, dear,” he cried. “Believe me
true,

My heart—my soul is filled with love of you !
Disguised, I made one of your little band,
That climbed the icy heights of Switzerland—
The poor old man you lent a helping hand.
The same you met at Venice and at Rome,
Is here to welcome you and Allan home.
He cannot, will not, live without your love !

“Can naught I say, those firm-set features
move?

See ! Edith, love, I kneel to you. Forgive
The wrong I did, and teach me how to live !
Companion to a soul, so purely white,
I cannot wander very far from right.”

Young Allan wiped the tear-drops from his
eyes

And hoarsely said :

“Rise, father, rise !

My mother said that she was led to do

Her noble acts through love she bore for you ;
And still her soul's high altar you possess.
Has she like place in yours ? In truthfulness
I pray you make the answer. Be it yes ?
My word for it, she will not say you nay."

"As surely as the light comes from above,
She reigns within my heart, my soul's best
love,"

He answered fervently. "Come, darling, come !
Of our few years on earth, we still have some
That we may render beautiful and bright—
O, be it mine to make their bloom and light !"

A moment later, Edith, sobbing, lay,
Her fair head lighted by the latest ray
Bequeathed to earth by the departing day,
Within the reaching arms of Ronald Dean—
A pretty foreground to that sunset scene.

Two weddings—son and father, side by side.
But who shall say which was the happier bride,
The sweet young girl whose life had known no
care,

In conscious youth and beauty standing there,
Pledging her vows with young love's hopeful
pride ;

Or she with dewy eyes and golden hair,
Who in affliction's furnace had been tried,
And by its searching fires been purified !

Edith had won the right to happiness ;
And in God's own good time, it came to bless
And bring her recompense. She found it in
A full atonement for her selfish sin.

This life has many roads (all end the same,)
Some bright with glory, others dark with shame ;
But all have pitfalls to some deeper woe,

Than glances at the surface-ground can show ;
And he who standeth may not well condemn
Those, who, less thoughtful, falleth into them.

All ways are sometimes dark. He liveth best.
Whose light does most to make his fellows blest,
All paths are short. The end comes, and not
late.

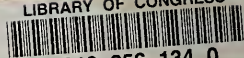
Too precious is our time to cherish hate,
Or waste the fleeting hours in selfishness,
That might so many cheer, and guide, and bless.

As all are sinners, by forgiving sin
And lifting up the fallen, we may win
The surest title to our happiness—
Indeed it can be bought with nothing less.

The text of Edith's life is in the line ;
"To err is human ; to forgive, divine."

THE END.

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